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ARGOSY

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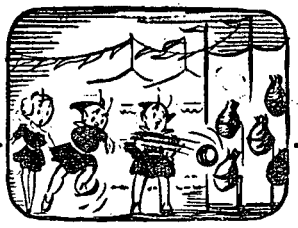

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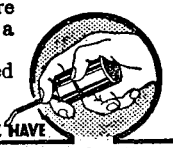

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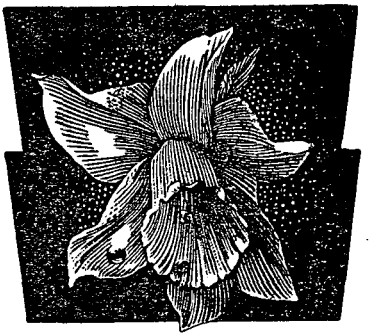

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ARGOSY

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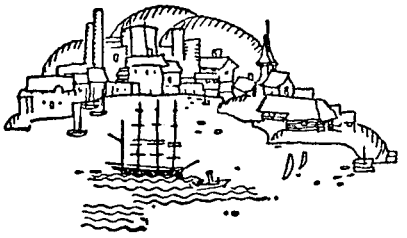
Foghorns

CRYING like children lost, through heavy white,
the children of trees, the homebound fishing fleet
hunts for the harbour at the edge of night.
Dark is the running water. Harsh and sweet,

the following throats of gulls, unseen above
the straining masts, speak wildly of their hunger.
Searching with cautious prows for land and love,
the lean boats lift their frightened voices, stronger

than a breath ago. The urgent questions swell,
fail, and begin again. Through wet white smother,
the boats ache blindly towards the harbour bell,
crying like lonely children to one another.

FRANCES FROST



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THE GOAD

"One day, my cousin," he said softly, "you will be before the avalanche— and there will be no escape!"

by M. EDWIN

AT the back of Otto's mind, while he watched the blurred outline of the bull moose sharpen with the rising of the moon, was the thought that here was something Finkel did not share, something Finkel could not spoil.

On a bluff where the spruce forest stopped, and only stunted willow and birch trees straggled down the slope to the swampy edge of the lake, the boy lay propped on his elbows staring at the huge beast silhouetted against the shining water. Its head bore massive antlers with a six-foot spread which appeared to Otto like grotesque, gigantic hands, and its high-bridged, lumpy nose, its protruding upper lip, and the bell of flabby skin beneath its neck added to the oddity of shape. Power was in the shoulders hunched under the bristling mane, and in the long, angular legs; yet mildness seemed manifest in the animal's noiseless movements and its choice of lily-pads and leafy twigs for food. An amiable beast, the moose—so Sim, the forest-ranger, had told him—except at mating-time or when cornered in a hunt.

Suddenly Finkel was beside him, silent as an apparition and equally ominous. Otto sighed. He might have known that Finkel, for all his lack of patience, would acquire skill in tracking more easily than himself.

Moonlight reached the tall figure leaning against a spruce trunk and was thrown back by Finkel's eyes and by a tip of steel on the long stick he carried. At the sight of the steel, Otto slumped forward on his crossed wrists, grimacing against them in horror and despair.

"Not again . . . not again," he protested.

Noises beat about his brain: the drumming of hoofs, the crackle of fire, the clatter of falling stones, the rattle of machine guns in action.

He looked up again and saw that the moose had vanished. Relaxing, he said to Finkel: "You will never touch one of those." Even as he spoke, he grew doubtful. "If you did, nothing would happen. Moose are not cattle. They would not stampede. They just fade out."

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The older youth, who was almost a man, dropped to the ground in one supple movement and put out a conciliatory hand; but he let the stick fall in front of Otto, and it lay in full view with its steel tip glinting like a malicious eye.

"You are rather like a moose yourself, Otto." Finkel's brilliant glance flickered from shoulders so heavy as to appear mis-shapen to a full-lipped mouth, adolescent, not yet firm, and an absurd nose, slightly bulbous at the tip, and was arrested unexpectedly by steady eyes, profound and disturbing.

"This time," said Otto deliberately, "I will not come away with you."

"I do not know what you mean," Finkel blustered. "And you are nothing but a squat little toad."

"I mean it, Finkel. I like living here. I will not let you spoil it."

Displaced persons first of all by the ill fortune of war, and vagrants now from their own, or rather Finkel's, choice, they spoke slow, careful English together, burying still deeper the remnants of the past, disclaiming a heritage that none the less was their burden.

Finkel rose and stood balancing his steel-tipped stick, while he looked down at his cousin crouching there, vulnerable and yet for the first time as potentially dangerous as a baited beast. Until their wanderings had brought them to the moose country there had never been any doubt that where Finkel led, Otto would follow.

"Such a fuss about nothing! This is only to mark the trees, in case I am lost . . . It is all right, Toto."

He had only to switch on his charm, and drop his light, high voice on the childish name, to leave Otto disarmed.

"All right," repeated Otto.

Not duped, but entangled in bonds of affection and shared memories, he let his head droop again and lay remembering a woman's voice: "*Mon petit Toto . . .*" So faint was his recollection of his mother that when he thought of her voice and Finkel's he scarcely knew which was the echo of the other. "*Mon pauvre petit Toto . . .*"

After Finkel had left him, Otto's mind swung back and forth over the memories of the years since his new life had begun in 1940 in a wayside ditch near a European frontier. Two waifs, both of mixed parentage, had clung together, the younger soothing the hysterical elder boy, and had emerged from that ditch inextricably bound together, to tread the road that had led at length to the northern forests of Canada.

Much of the lamentable history of the two young men had become softened in the wholesome mind of sturdy little Otto Vine.

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Yet, because it was punctuated by Finkel's recurrent outbursts of violence, the story had a dreadful continuity.

There had been a brief interlude of orderliness, too great an orderliness for Finkel, when authorities took charge and the two boys were sent across the Atlantic to relatives who had with great difficulty been traced.

From the time they had run away from the home of those relatives the lads had been vagrants, always on the move, earning a precarious livelihood on farms and cattle-ranges. Otto, with his longing for stability, had chosen a surname for himself and would have settled almost anywhere had not Finkel's overpowering desire for excitement led again and again to disgrace and expulsion or a hasty flight from punishment.

Scene after scene flashed through Otto's mind. A stone prised loose by one of Finkel's hateful implements, and a cataract of gravel, stones, and boulders rumbling down a hillside swelling to an avalanche, which swept on and on towards a frail shack, while Finkel leapt aside, screaming: "I shall be safe! It cannot touch me!" A fire growing from a small tongue of flame to a devouring monster and engulfing a whole field of ripe corn. A mob of goaded cattle surging through a fertile valley in wild stampede. And always Finkel's shout of triumph: "*I* am safe!"

What seemed wanton destructiveness had a meaning hidden from all but Otto; and he understood only in part his cousin's craving to prove his own invulnerability. Shudderingly he recalled Finkel's greedy gaze, when others were in danger, and his ecstasy over his own safety. It seemed that ever since the escape from the ditch, some torment of the mind had forced Finkel to seek release from danger. And where none threatened he had to create the danger himself.

Otto fell asleep on the bluff and woke at dawn. The water below was smooth and pearly in the pale light, till it broke in ripples spreading slantwise from the flanks of a young bull moose. The deer, already nearly as tall as a horse but with antlers that suggested immaturity, waded deep to reach a patch of juicy weeds and browse upon them.

At a movement from Otto, its big ears jerked and its bulky snout turned towards the bluff. It put on pace, reached shallow water and heaved up its rugged body, then crossed the quaking bog as easily as if it had been solid ground and disappeared into a thicket of hemlock.

Filled with satisfaction, Otto went in search of Sim, who understood so well the thrill of tracking, not to kill but to observe, and who knew so much about the ways of the moose, which of all animals had captured the boy's interest.

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" An old bull and a young one," said Otto.

The forest-ranger was pleased and said : " Good for you ! "

" I saw them too," Finkel said resentfully.

" Well, I hope the moose didn't see either of you." Sim smiled at Otto's crestfallen look. " Never mind. You're getting on. Doing very well."

He hesitated. To most of the rangers, trappers and lumbermen of the region, the two youths were simply strong lads who could do useful work. A few guessed that it might be wise to ask no questions. Sim alone was deeply concerned about them, touched by their gropings for reassurance in a world they had found hostile, and aware of the growing conflict between them. He decided to speak.

" I have a plan for one of you—or both. Next spring a well known naturalist, Major Raycliff, is coming north to make films of the moose, to show its whole story round the year. He will want help. If you become as good at tracking as I think you might—"

" Spring is a long way off," muttered Finkel. " Is he going to hunt moose ? "

" No ! No killing. ' Shooting ' with a camera only." Sim turned to Otto and watched pleasure in the idea slowly brighten his face. " Well, Otto ? "

" By next spring," said the boy, " I will know every place where the moose feed and where they hide and what they do in every season of the year."

Finkel, laughing, snatched a knife from his belt and flung it at the cabin door behind Otto, within a foot of his head.

Sim stepped forward, furious, saying : " How dare you ? "

But Otto pulled out the knife, tried to smooth the splintered wood, and said dispassionately : " It is all right. He was not aiming at me. He never misses what he aims at."

" Get on with your work, both of you ! "

The rest of the summer passed quietly. How Finkel spent his spare time Otto did not know, for he himself had become absorbed in his study of the moose and his mind was so stocked with pictures that in company he was aloof. His face was tranquil as he saw again that cow moose by the river, twitching her ears to rid them of the swarms of flies ; that bull with the velvet peeling from his antlers ; those long, loose lips fumbling for the sappiest twigs. Such glimpses were adding up to an intimate knowledge of the beast that Finkel had said Otto resembled : shy, ungainly, but powerful, possibly dangerous when provoked.

In the autumn the moose grew bold and heedless of everything but their own urgent desires. The clear, full notes of cow moose eager for mating sounded in the forest, and the bulls answered them

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hoarsely and crashed with unwonted noise through the undergrowth. The antlers the bulls had been growing during the summer were ready now for combat, and sometimes, as if in rehearsal, were clashed against the saplings. Yet when a bull moose was startled it would speed away through the forest, swinging its head from side to side to keep the antlers clear of the outstretched limbs of the trees.

It was in the fall, too, that the first real clash came between Otto Vine and Finkel. Since for some time he had given up watching Finkel, it was by chance that Otto caught his cousin in the very act of fire-raising.

" Put it out . . . put it out . . . stamp on it ! "

Inflamed by Finkel's laugh, Otto charged like a young bull.

" You . . . you . . ."

He could not express in words his determination to fight at last for his own way of living ; he could only use fists, head, and feet to hammer home his protest against another shameful upheaval, another uprooting from a place where he felt he might belong.

" Otto." A small, craven voice spoke his name. " Otto . . . *Oh, Toto !* "

He broke away, suddenly calm, and set to work to beat out the flames. While he worked he gave a warning. " Some day you will be in the way, Finkel, in front, not behind, and you will not be able to stop what you have started."

" It is the noises in my head, Toto. The guns, you know. The crackle-crackle of a fire covers them up, and when the crackle stops, or any of the other terrible noises, the noises in my head stop too—for a while."

" Nonsense ! You are putting it on. You do not like work and you are bored. That is why you do such things . . . Get on with it. Beat those flames out . . . Oh, I am out of patience with you ! "

There was only a charred patch for Sim to see, when he arrived ; and he praised the boys and prepared to signal to the fire-patrol aircraft if it should come that way, attracted by the smoke. He made no comment on what was smouldering in Otto and Finkel ; but he knew that their conflict was unresolved.

As winter approached, the moose lost their pugnacity towards one another and gathered in small herds ; but they were more cautious than ever, and Otto found them hard to overtake and view clearly, for they fed downwind, with a close watch for anyone who might surprise them from behind. Even when the snow came and the giant deer left footprints wherever they went, the tracks were so confused that Otto seldom unravelled them before fresh snow wiped them out. Yet, in the end, he did find a moose-yard not far from the

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river, a sheltered place where the moose took refuge from the winter storms.

He told Sim about the moose-yard—but without giving its exact location, because Finkel was lounging at the other side of the hearth — and the ranger noticed afresh the boy's pleasure in his growing knowledge of the forest. When Finkel was not morose his talk was full of boasting and fantasy, concerned with the past or the future.

Otto was intent on the present, and his silences were serene. It was Sim's hope that the younger boy, who was developing rapidly both physically and mentally, would gain the ascendancy. But he was troubled and when he looked down at the fire-lit book upon his knee he found that his eyes were dazzled.

Otto, sprawling on the floor, gazed at him and said: "Read aloud."

After a pause, Sim began: "*And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*" The man's finger moved to the margin. "*A sound of gentle stillness.*"

To Otto the bearded face in the firelight had the look of a prophet in a picture dimly recalled from a quiet childhood in which books had a place. He became aware that his life did not date from that day of terror in the ditch but had roots and could draw strength from deep sources.

Sim looked gravely at the boy and slowly repeated the marginal phrase, savouring it. "*A sound of gentle stillness.*"

At the turn of the year the bull moose shed their antlers; but there were few signs that winter was waning. The herd still sheltered in the yard among the spruces and left it only to obtain food. In time of hard frost the animals made their way frequently across the frozen river to a plantation where they could find sweeter bark, as well as moss and lichens; when the snow was soft, however, they moved only a short distance, ploughing deep furrows as they went.

Towards spring, Otto grew more perturbed about Finkel's moods; yet he reacted neither to bullying nor to wheedling. And Finkel, finding him no longer pliant, felt himself cut off, alone with his tormenting fantasies, and became desperate.

The thaw came as no surprise to Otto, for he had listened attentively to Sim, and he grasped immediately the meaning of the changes he noticed beside the river. He stopped at the end of what he called the moose-lane, the much trodden trench along which

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the beasts came and went between their crossing-place over the river and their yard in the forest. The hoof-prints were lost in slush, and the steep banks of snow on each side of the lane were grey beneath their crusts of sagging ice.

Turning to the river, he saw that the surface water on the ice was considerable; he guessed there was water below, too, and that the river, frozen solid all winter, was in motion again, surging forward over its stony bed and at the same time pressing up against the restraining ice. A distant sound of cracking confirmed this idea.

Otto wondered whether the moose felt the change of season in their blood, or listened to the drip of melted snow from the branches, and had some foreknowledge of their release from the restrictions of winter. They would be free soon to scatter over their wide range and return to the marshes and the lily-ponds. Would they cross the ice on the river again, and feel the surface water lap about their feet, or would they wait and swim? He shook his head, giving up the attempt to project himself into the mind of the beast. Then a new and sharper cracking sent his thoughts leaping back to the moose-yard.

"A rifle . . . Finkel!"

So clear was his picture of the confusion in the moose-yard that his own heart thudded in sympathy. He saw the jostling beasts and felt their terror. Their peace—and his—was shattered.

"It has happened," he said aloud.

Down the lane came the moose, eyes rolling, ears laid back, jets of breath mingling with a flurry of snow. Ahead of them raced Finkel on his snowshoes, and his eyes too were wild.

A mass of snow slithered to the ground and the tree that had borne the load broke in the moment of unburdening and fell among the deer. In mounting panic they rushed ahead, making for the open river beyond the confines of the lane. They slipped and stumbled in the sloppy snow; yet Finkel gained little ground, for his snowshoes became clogged and dragged at his feet instead of bearing him smoothly on.

"Jump aside!" yelled Otto.

"All right on the ice," gasped Finkel. "You will see. I shall be safe." A flame of arrogance swept the terror from his face. "I will lead these brutes a dance."

Otto hesitated, tempted to take the chance to save himself; then he flung himself on Finkel.

"Down in the ditch . . . The ice is breaking."

Finkel struggled free, laughing shrilly. "It is safe enough. Come with me, Toto. Ah! Would you? Take that." He struck savagely at Otto's face. "You fool . . ."

As Otto fell into a hollow, the stampeding herd reached the ice.

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A bull weighing over half a ton was close on Finkel's heels. It checked and tried to turn, and the whole herd veered, when a great fissure appeared in the ice.

" *I* shall be safe ! "

The crazed cry of triumph made Otto raise his head. Beyond the bull moose, frantic with fear among the broken ice, and a slab that was tilted high in the air, Finkel could still be seen leaping to and fro, seeking a solid foothold. The moose went under and slab after slab piled up where the animal had been. At the edge of the river the rest of the herd snorted and trembled, and presently retreated to the forest, leaving Otto lying there listening to the crescendo of sound.

No wild laughter; no screams; nothing reached him but the sounds of that cataclysmic break-up of the ice, which gathered momentum with amazing speed.

In a moment of maturity Otto perceived the truth. Nothing could have saved Finkel. Nothing. He had been destroyed—long ago.

Then there was only a grief-stricken boy, sobbing in desolation. " Oh, Finkel . . . *Finkel !* "

At last Otto lay exhausted. The uproar went on, so near, yet remote, pushed to the background of his consciousness by the need to listen for what he knew must come : *a sound of gentle stillness.*

* * *

TWICE BITTEN . . .

A very distinguished general was travelling across Europe in a famous train. Nestling into the *frou-frou* cosiness of his first class sleeper, he lay like a warrior taking his rest. In the morning, he awoke to find himself badly bitten; he was in fact crawling from crown to spurs.

Safely home in hygienic surroundings, he wrote to the railway company in terms of extreme hauteur. In due course he received a long letter, beautifully typed on fancy notepaper. In it the company's English secretary fairly overwhelmed the victim with the flood and vigour of his apologies.

" *Never before had such a thing been heard of . . . anything they could say . . . there was no excuse . . . doctor's bills . . . humiliation of an eminent passenger . . . the shame of it . . . etc., etc. . . .*"

" Very civil, these people, I must say," allowed the general as, mollified, he refolded the letter. Then something caught his eye. Gathered up with the last sheet was a scrap of paper upon which was scribbled in blue pencil : " *Send this gink the bedbug letter.*"

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NO ICE FOR DRISSI

"It will become a heritage," he said, "to be divided in many parts"

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

THE old sheikh sat with us on the floor in the bare, white walled reception room of the Foreign Legion post of Foum el Ghazni, far in the Moroccan Sahara. With an expression of exaggerated bliss, he sipped his sweet, hot mint tea, and when at last he put down his cup, it was as though the thought of having finished a draught of such nectar caused him infinite pain. He retired into his *burnous*, like a tortoise withdrawing its head into its shell, then a moment later emerged to protest, with no intention of eventual refusal, against the refilling of his cup. When his protestations had been formally overcome, courtly delight reappeared on his face like the sun coming out after a moment in the clouds.

"*Sidi Capitaine*," he said at last in soft-flowing Arabic, "it has come to the ears of my tribe—and I myself know it to be true—that there exists a machine, white and smooth like a great casket, which produces an exceedingly cold substance."

Our host, Morvan de Coulanges, of the *Affaires Indigènes*, exquisite in his spotless tunic and baggy white Arab trousers, smiled and leaned forward as he listened.

"You are right, Caid Drissi," he said, "that is true."

He turned to me and spoke rapidly in English.

"He has seen the two refrigerators you flew out to me today," he said. Then a moment later Morvan added: "You and Drissi should understand each other. He is one of the shrewdest business men I know, though he has never been in a big city in his life. He drives camels between South and North Sahara, and is probably richer than you or I will ever be in our lives."

He turned again to the sheikh, reverting to Arabic.

"Caid Drissi," he said, "I was reciting some of your many virtues to my friend who, like yourself, is a distinguished trader. He speaks Arabic well, but I thought your modesty might be offended by my compliments."

The old man nodded his head rhythmically, a delicate appreciative smile on his lips. Morvan had been there many years and loved and understood the Arabs. He was one of those whom the

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Sahara had captured body and soul, and now he was more of it than of Paris where he was born forty years before.

"In return for the pleasure which your company and your valuable thoughts invariably give me," Morvan continued, "is there anything in which I can be of service to you? For I am your servant as well as the master in this place, as you have long known."

Drissi affected to hesitate, raised a protesting hand at the very thought of Morvan, lord of hundreds of square miles of sandy *djebel* and sparse, palmed oasis, as his servant. Then, after long apologies for occupying so much of his priceless time, he came to the point.

"*Sidi Capitaine*, I wish to buy one of these cold machines," he announced.

Morvan smiled and waved his hand towards me with a large gesture.

"My friend holds a high position in a distant country, and is concerned with making and selling just such instruments. In fact he has brought two of them to this post for me personally, this very day."

"God is great. His ways are indeed inscrutable," rejoined the old man.

He turned to me.

"I greet you," he said. "Those who are the friends of the *Sidi Capitaine* cannot be far from our hearts who have long benefited from his wise counsel."

With his right hand he saluted me by touching first his forehead, then his lips, then the centre of his stomach. After a short pause, his face changed and all at once he became the man of affairs, the shrewd camel dealer, the observant sceptic, the hard driver of bargains.

"I would imagine that, owing to the vast numbers for which the parched world is constantly crying, the price of these instruments," he said, looking at me through narrowed eyes, "which you, with rare perspicacity and sympathetic understanding of the needs of those who suffer in the heat, have the supreme skill to build, may be such that even the humble and the poor, like ourselves, may dare consider employing them."

Morvan again smiled his slow smile, then looked at me and winked.

"This looks like being a very long talk," he warned. "In a moment, we'll see if he knows anything about electricity."

He spoke in English, pretending to explain a point in what the Caid had just said, then turned to the old man.

"Drissi," he said softly, "you can be sure that, like an honest camel dealer, my friend, when he does business with one who is

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also my friend, will not be grasping, but just and fair. There is always a true price."

Drissi nodded his head politely, but something in his eyes revealed that never in his life had he known an honest camel dealer. He savoured Morvan's irony for a moment, then capped it gently with his own.

" Of course, *Sidi Capitaine*," he said, " justice and fair dealing, the virtues which we prize in you, will surely be found in your friends also."

Morvan acknowledged the compliment and beckoned to his servant to fill the teacups again. The sound of women's laughter came in to us from the blazing sun and hot shadow of the courtyard outside, mingled with the din of a sudden quarrel among the camel men. It rose to a quick crescendo, then, as suddenly as it had begun, died away. Feet shuffled on the sand, the disputants parted with a last ringing oath and the afternoon settled again into silence and distant women's chatter, soothing and musical.

Morvan addressed himself again to business. " Caid Drissi," he continued, " you are aware of the nature of the power which brings cold to the instrument you seek, as it brings light to this place by night ? "

The old sheikh closed his eyes as though utter fatigue had seized him at the mere suggestion that ohms, watts and voltage were not the subjects of nightly conversation round his campfires and during his journeyings through the interminable wastes. He was playing for time. At last his eyes opened and he pursed his lips judiciously.

" The *Sidi Capitaine* himself would not undertake the trimming of his own lamps," he declared with dignity. " Nor do I concern myself directly with the means by which they are lit. My servants do such things. But I am aware that the force of which you speak is trapped out of the air, attracted by the hum of a small machine that hums as the bees hum in the gardens of Taroudant. If necessary, we can purchase one of these machines also, *Sidi Capitaine*. We do not lack the means. God, the merciful, the just, has been kind to us these many seasons. *Oua-ha*."

He clapped his hands. A few moments later two negroes glistening with moisture, white teeth shining, pink tongues darting in and out between their lips, and wearing ragged white *djellabas*, ran cheerfully into the room, dragging a large rough ball wrapped in a black cloth. They were jolly and full of laughter. Drissi ordered them to undo the package.

It was Morvan who guessed the contents first. Body bent forward, fingertips on the ground in front of him, he had been contemplating the scene with delight.

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"My God, would you believe it, money!" he cried. "Bank-notes! Thousands of miserable bits of paper! And to think that this man travels the old gold and ivory trading route through Tindouf! At least he has a uniquely rotten banking system—worse even than our own. If only there are some notes of this century!"

The two negroes, puffing and tumbling like clowns, stripped the cloth from the ragged ball of coloured notes pressed tightly together, then laid it within reach of Caid Drissi's right hand. He looked first at Morvan, then at me.

"This," and he patted it as though it were a mettlesome horse, "will be enough and more than enough, will it not? Even if we must have the humming machine, as well as the smooth white chest with the door that opens silently, and the fittings of silver? My tribe, and especially the other members of my family, have a great longing for this thing. I am old and satisfied with the world's ways as they are, but they," he sighed, "they wish to be accompanied by the new magic."

He lowered his voice and remained hunched up for a moment as though appalled by the senseless march of progress.

"The old fraud!" exclaimed Morvan with a chuckle. "His word is law. The very idea of the other members of his family, meaning the women, having a single idea contrary to his own is laughable. The facts are, he has a lot of money this year and he has been shown the refrigerators you have just brought for me, by my cook Ali. He is dying to take one of them into the desert with him in order to show off to his friends. Have you ever sold a refrigerator to a person who has not the least intention of ever using it? If not, you are going to now. You can bring me another next time you come out. I insist!"

Somehow, at this second, my whole training rose up against the projected deal. I thought idiotically of our five year guarantee, of our servicing arrangements.

"Morvan, *mon cher*, I can't, I simply can't," I said. "It wouldn't be fair, it wouldn't be good business in the long run. Suppose that, at Timbuktu or somewhere, the thing turned up, after two thousand miles on the back of a camel, and was sold in an unusable state as new, in a territory in which we have no concession. Suppose . . ."

Caid Drissi, who had been watching us intently, interrupted, with an interrogative gesture of the shoulders.

"The money is insufficient?" he queried. "I had considered, for my part, that two hundred and fifty thousand francs would be enough, but I see now that the transport of such a thing together with the machine that hums, far into the desert, as we are now, may have been very costly."

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He clapped his hands, and the two black servants ran in again, laughing gaily, enjoying their moment of notoriety.

" Tell Si Abdel Khali to bring gold," he said grandly.

I was gripped by despair.

" Morvan," I cried, " for pity's sake stop him. Tell him I would of course sell him one of our damned refrigerators if he could use it, but he can't. Tell him I have no concession where he is going. Tell him anything you like, but tell him I won't sell ! "

At this point Drissi, with upturned eyes, was about to appeal to God for justice, but Morvan began to laugh, pointing at me with a shaking finger. Tears poured down his face.

" Lord, what a salesman ! What an artist ! " he said, wiping his eyes. " Don't you see you are pushing the price up ? In a few minutes he'll be offering to pay you part in camels, part in women, part in gold—no cheque for your company, but a menagerie, a harem and gold from the mine. He's mad to get a refrigerator. He doesn't care if it works or not, or if the guarantee is for ten minutes or a thousand years ! So sell, man, quickly, sell, unless you want to be the cause of breaking up a beautiful friendship—Drissi's and mine ! I shall be blamed if he gets no refrigerator, remember. Jack, I appeal to your famous English sense of humour ! "

Just as Si Abdel Khali, a long, solemn, untidy man with a grey *burnous*, flapping slippers and *glaucoma* in one eye arrived with a bag of gold made of leather, I capitulated.

" All right then, Morvan, if you insist," I said stiffly. " If, as you say, a refusal would undo the work of years, I'll sell the Caid a refrigerator after all."

Drissi immediately sensed the change of atmosphere and as Si Abdel Khali handed him the leather bag, he stowed it quickly away in the folds of his sleeve, and coughed awkwardly.

" My friend, with an inspired appreciation of your distinguished virtues," explained Morvan, " was expressing doubts as to whether his miserable machine was worthy of so renowned an owner. As you saw, I laughed him to scorn."

" God is great, God is merciful," murmured Drissi, not believing a word of the explanation. " I see that the *Sidi Capitaine*, always the hope of the poor, the father of the orphan, the patron of the honest, has smoothed the path of commerce. Let us go, therefore, and see the exquisite, the shining, the supernatural product of the incomparable genius of our friend ; let us rejoice over its beauty, then feast after we have completed the bargain."

We rose with one accord and went to the kitchen where Ali, black and smiling with pleasure over his new toy, stripped to the waist and hissing like a groom, was polishing the already perfect white enamel of Morvan's refrigerator.

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Next morning, still heavy after the gigantic *diffaa* which Caid Drissi had offered us to celebrate our bargain, we stood in the yard and watched the loading of his camels. He took me by the arm and led me to where his refrigerator, stripped of its protective jacket which had already been cut up to make a saddlecloth for the camel on which it was to ride, stood glistening in the morning sun, awaiting packing. Drissi opened and shut it lovingly, but with a terrific bang.

" Perfect ! Delightful ! My whole tribe is gratified. It shall be handled with the care accorded to virgins. See, it is to be carried by Yasmina, the choicest of my she-camels."

The choice Yasmina looked at us with a camel's mighty disdain, and for twenty minutes skilfully defended herself against being loaded with Drissi's precious acquisition. It had two bad falls which made me wince, but finally, swathed in ropes and covered with a torn tarpaulin, the refrigerator vanished for ever into the shimmering heat-haze at the tail end of Drissi's long caravan.

" Make no mistake about it," said Morvan as we strolled back to lunch, " you will get a lot of repeat orders. If the possession of the refrigerator brings him luck, Drissi will talk about it. The enquiries will come to me, and I'll pass them on to you. Also, when eventually the old man dies, don't think for a moment that one person will inherit the whole refrigerator. On the contrary, they will break it up and his sons and relatives will all take a piece.

" Yes, ten years hence, anywhere between here and Dakar, you may be served with a meal in the door of your refrigerator, or see the body of it used as a clothes chest for a bride. The aluminium and other metals will be melted down and used for inlay or damascening work on swords, coffeepots or jewellery. As for the engine, not long ago a savage tribe in the jungle of the Belgian Congo was found worshipping the engine of an aeroplane which they had dug up. I think your little engines would make excellent gods . . ."

Morvan stopped, delighted with the flow of his fancy.

" It's nature's reply to civilization, isn't it ? A new market for refrigerators, but they'll never be used to make ice ! You must tell them about it when you go home," he said. " Your directors will be interested."

* * *

DEFINITION

Savages are people who don't know what wrong is until missionaries show them.

Schoolboy Howler

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CASE OF THE CAPTURE OF CERBERUS

"The gates of Hell," she said, "are wide open to all—or almost all!"

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT, swaying to and fro in the tube train, thrown now against one body, now against another, thought to himself that there were too many people in the world! Certainly there were too many people in the Underground world of London at this particular time—six thirty—in the evening. Heat, noise, crowd, contiguity—the unwelcome pressure of hands, arms, bodies, shoulders! Hemmed in and pressed around by strangers—and on the whole, he thought distastefully, a plain and uninteresting lot of strangers! Humanity seen thus *en masse* was not attractive.

How seldom did one see a face sparkling with intelligence, how seldom a *femme bien mise!* What was this passion that attacked women for knitting under the most unpropitious conditions? A woman did not look her best knitting; the absorption, the glassy eyes, the restless, busy fingers! One needed the agility of a wild cat, and the will power of a Napoleon to manage to knit in a crowded tube, but women managed it! If they succeeded in obtaining a seat, out came a miserable little strip of shrimp pink, and click, click went the pins!

No repose, thought Poirot, no feminine grace! His elderly soul revolted from the stress and hurry of the modern world. All these young women who surrounded him—so alike, so devoid of charm, so lacking in rich, alluring femininity! He demanded a more flamboyant appeal. Ah! to see a *femme du monde, chic, sympathique, spirituelle*—a woman with ample curves, a woman ridiculously and extravagantly dressed! Once there had been such women. But now—now—

The train stopped at a station; people surged out, forcing Poirot back on to the points of knitting pins; surged in, squeezing him into even more sardine-like proximity with his fellow passengers. The train started off again with a jerk, Poirot was thrown against a stout woman with knobbly parcels, said "*Pardon!*" bounced off again into a long angular man whose attaché case caught him in

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the small of the back. He said "*Pardon!*" again. He felt his moustache becoming limp and uncurled. Fortunately the next station was his!

It was also the station of what seemed to be about a hundred and fifty other people, since it happened to be Piccadilly Circus. Like a great tidal wave they flowed out on to the platform. Presently Poirot was again jammed tightly on an escalator being carried upwards towards the surface of the earth.

Up, thought Poirot, from the Infernal Regions . . . How exquisitely painful was a suitcase rammed into one's knees from behind on an ascending escalator!

At that moment, a voice cried his name. Startled, he raised his eyes. On the opposite escalator, the one descending, his unbelieving eyes saw a vision from the past. A woman of full and flamboyant form; her luxuriant henna red hair crowned with a small saucer of straw to which was attached a positive platoon of brilliantly feathered little birds. Exotic looking furs dripped from her shoulders.

Her crimson mouth opened wide, her rich, foreign voice echoed resoundingly. She had good lungs.

"It *is!*" she screamed. "But it is! *Mon cher Hercule Poirot!* We must meet again! I insist!"

But Fate itself is not more inexorable than the behaviour of two escalators moving in an inverse direction. Steadily, remorselessly, Hercule Poirot was borne upwards, and the Countess Vera Rossakoff was borne downwards.

Twisting himself sideways, leaning over the balustrade, Poirot cried despairingly, "*Chère Madame*—where can I find you?"

Her reply came to him faintly from the depths. It was unexpected, yet seemed at the moment strangely apposite.

"In *Hell* . . ."

Hercule Poirot blinked. He blinked again. Suddenly he rocked on his feet. Unawares he had reached the top—and had neglected to step off properly. The crowd spread out round him. A little to one side a dense crowd was pressing on to the downward escalator. Should he join them? Had that been the Countess' meaning? No doubt that travelling in the bowels of the earth at the rush hour *was* Hell. If that *had* been the Countess' meaning, he could not agree with her more . . .

Resolutely Poirot crossed over, sandwiched himself into the descending crowd and was borne back into the depths. At the foot of the escalator there was no sign of the Countess.

Was the Countess patronizing the Bakerloo or the Piccadilly line? Poirot visited each platform in turn. He was swept about amongst surging crowds boarding or leaving trains, but nowhere

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did he espy that flamboyant Russian figure, the Countess Vera Rossakoff.

Weary, battered, and infinitely chagrined, Hercule Poirot once more ascended to ground level and stepped out into the hubbub of Piccadilly Circus. He reached home in a mood of pleasurable excitement.

It is the misfortune of small precise men to hanker after large and flamboyant women. Poirot had never been able to rid himself of the fatal fascination the Countess held for him. Though it was something like twenty years since he had seen her last, the magic still held. Granted that her make-up now resembled a scene painter's sunset, with the woman under the make-up well hidden from sight, to Hercule Poirot she still represented the sumptuous and the alluring. The little bourgeois was still thrilled by the aristocrat.

The memory of the adroit way she stole jewellery roused the old admiration. He remembered the magnificent aplomb with which she had admitted the fact when taxed with it. A woman in a thousand—in a million! And he had met her again—and lost her!

"In *Hell*," she had said. Surely his ears had not deceived him? She *had* said that?

But what had she meant by it? *Had* she meant London's Underground Railways? Or were her words to be taken in a religious sense? Surely, even if her own way of life made Hell the most plausible destination for her after this life, surely—surely her Russian courtesy would not suggest that Hercule Poirot was necessarily bound for the same place?

No, she must have meant something quite different. She must have meant—Hercule Poirot was brought up short against bewilderment. What an intriguing, what an unpredictable woman! A lesser woman might have shrieked *The Ritz* or *Claridge's*. But Vera Rossakoff had cried poignantly and impossibly: "Hell!"

Poirot sighed. But he was not defeated.

In his perplexity he took the simplest and most straightforward course on the following morning: he asked his secretary, Miss Lemon.

Miss Lemon was unbelievably ugly and incredibly efficient. To her Poirot was nobody in particular—he was merely her employer. She gave him excellent service. Her private thoughts and dreams were concentrated on a new filing system which she was slowly perfecting in the recesses of her mind.

"Miss Lemon, may I ask you a question?"

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" Of course, M. Poirot." Miss Lemon took her fingers off the typewriter keys and waited attentively.

" If a friend asked you to meet her—or him—in Hell, what would you do ? "

Miss Lemon, as usual, did not pause. She knew, as the saying goes, all the answers.

" It would be advisable, I think, to ring up for a table," she said.

Hercule Poirot stared at her in a stupefied fashion.

He said, *staccato*, " You—would—ring—up—for—a table ? "

Miss Lemon nodded and drew the telephone towards her.

" Tonight ? " she asked, and taking assent for granted since he did not speak, she dialled briskly.

" Temple Bar 14578 ? Is that *Hell* ? Will you please reserve a table for two. M. Hercule Poirot. Eleven o'clock."

She replaced the receiver, and her fingers hovered over the keys of her typewriter. A slight—a very slight look of impatience was discernible upon her face. She had done her part, the look seemed to say, surely her employer could now leave her to get on with what she was doing ?

But Hercule Poirot required explanations.

" What is it, then, this *Hell* ? " he demanded.

Miss Lemon looked slightly surprised.

" Oh, didn't you know, M. Poirot ? It's a night club—quite new and very much the rage at present—run by some Russian woman, I believe. I can fix up for you to become a member before this evening quite easily."

Whereupon, having wasted, as she made obvious, quite time enough, Miss Lemon broke into a perfect fusillade of efficient typing.

At eleven that evening Hercule Poirot passed through a doorway over which a neon sign discreetly showed one letter at a time. A gentleman in red tails received him and took from him his coat.

A gesture directed him to a flight of wide shallow stairs leading downwards. On each step a phrase was written.

The first one ran : " *I meant well . . .*"

The second : " *Wipe the slate clean and start afresh . . .*"

The third : " *I can give it up any time I like . . .*"

" The good intentions that pave the way to Hell," Hercule Poirot murmured appreciatively. " *C'est bien imaginé, ça !* "

He descended the stairs. At the foot was a tank of water with scarlet lilies. Spanning it was a bridge shaped like a boat. Poirot crossed by it.

On his left in a kind of marble grotto sat the largest and ugliest and blackest dog Poirot had ever seen ! It sat up very straight and

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gaunt and immovable. It was perhaps, he thought, and hoped, not *real.* But at that moment the dog turned its ferocious and ugly head, and from the depths of its black body a low, rumbling growl was emitted. It was a terrifying sound.

And then Poirot noticed a decorative basket of small round dog biscuits. They were labelled, " *A sop for Cerberus !* "

It was on them that the dog's eyes were fixed. Once again the low, rumbling growl was heard. Hastily Poirot picked up a biscuit and tossed it towards the great hound.

A cavernous red mouth yawned; then came a snap as the powerful jaws closed again. Cerberus had accepted his sop! Poirot moved on through an open doorway.

The room was not a big one. It was dotted with little tables, a space for dancing in the middle. It was lighted with small red lamps, there were frescoes on the walls, and at the far end was a vast grill at which officiated chefs dressed as devils with tails and horns.

All this Poirot took in before, with all the impulsiveness of her Russian nature, Countess Vera Rossakoff, resplendent in scarlet evening dress, bore down upon him with outstretched hands.

" Ah, you have come ! My dear—my *very* dear friend ! What a joy to see you again ! After such years—so many—how many ?—No, we will not say how many ! To me it seems but as yesterday. You have not changed—not in the least have you changed ! "

" Nor you, *chère amie,*" Poirot exclaimed, bowing over her hand.

Nevertheless, he was fully conscious now that twenty years is twenty years. Countess Rossakoff might not uncharitably have been described as a ruin. But she was at least a spectacular ruin. The exuberance, the full-blooded enjoyment of life was still there, and she knew, none better, how to flatter a man.

She drew Poirot with her to a table at which two other people were sitting.

" My friend, my celebrated friend, M. Hercule Poirot," she announced. " He who is the terror of evil doers ! I was once afraid of him myself, but now I lead a life of the extreme, the most virtuous dullness. Is it not so ? "

The tall thin elderly man to whom she spoke said, " Never say dull, Countess."

" The Professor Liskeard," the Countess announced. " He who knows everything about the past and who gave me the valuable hints for the decorations here."

The Archæologist shuddered slightly.

" If I'd known what you meant to do ! " he murmured. " The result is so appalling."

Poirot observed the frescoes more closely. On the wall facing

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him Orpheus and his jazz band played, while Eurydice looked hopefully towards the grill. On the opposite wall Osiris and Isis seemed to be throwing an Egyptian underworld boating party. On the third wall some bright young people were enjoying mixed bathing in a state of Nature.

"The Country of the Young," explained the Countess and added in the same breath, completing her introductions, "And this is my little Alicia."

Poirot bowed to the second occupant of the table, a severe looking girl in a check coat and skirt. She wore horn rimmed glasses.

"She is very, *very* clever," said Countess Rossakoff. "She has a degree and she is a psychologist, and she knows all the reasons why lunatics are lunatics! It is not, as you might think, because they are mad! No, there are all sorts of other reasons! I find that very peculiar."

The girl called Alicia smiled kindly but a little disdainfully. She asked the Professor in a firm voice if he would like to dance. He appeared flattered, but dubious.

"My dear young lady, I fear I only waltz."

"This *is* a waltz," said Alicia patiently.

They got up and danced. They did not dance well.

The Countess Rossakoff sighed. Following out a train of thought of her own, she murmured, "And yet she is not *really* bad looking . . ."

"She does not make the most of herself," said Poirot judicially.

"Frankly," cried the Countess, "I cannot understand the young people of nowadays. They do not try any more to please—always, in my youth, I tried—the colours that suited me—a little padding in the frocks—the corset laced tight round the waist—the hair, perhaps, a more interesting shade—"

She pushed back the heavy Titian tresses from her forehead—it was undeniable that she, at least, was still trying and trying hard!

"To be content with what Nature has given you, that—that is *stupid*! It is also arrogant! The little Alicia she writes pages of long words about sex, but how often, I ask you, does a man suggest to her that they should go to Brighton for the weekend? It is all long words and work, and the welfare of the workers, and the future of the world. It is very worthy, but I ask you, is it *gay*? And look, I ask you, how drab these young people have made the world! It is all regulations and prohibitions! Not so when I was young."

"That reminds me, how is your son, Madame?" At the last moment he substituted "son" for "little boy," remembering that twenty years had passed.

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The Countess' face lit up with enthusiastic motherhood.

"The beloved angel! So big now, such shoulders, so handsome! He is in America. He builds there—bridges, banks, hotels, department stores, railways, anything the Americans want!"

Poirot looked slightly puzzled.

"He is, then, an engineer? Or an architect?"

"What does it matter?" demanded the Countess. "He is adorable! He is wrapped up in iron girders, and machinery, and things called stresses. The kind of things that I have never understood in the least. But we adore each other—always we adore each other! And so for his sake I adore the little Alicia. But yes, they are engaged. They meet on a plane or a boat or a train, and they fall in love, all in the midst of talking about the welfare of the workers. And when she comes to London she comes to see me and I take her to my heart."

The Countess clasped her arms across her vast bosom, "And I say—'You and Niki love each other—so I too love you—but if you love him, why do you leave him in America?' And she talks about her 'job' and the book she is writing, and her career, and frankly I do not understand, but I have always said: 'One must be tolerant.'" She added all in one breath, "And what do you think, *cher ami*, of all this that I have imagined here?"

"It is very well imagined," said Poirot, looking round him approvingly. "It is *chic*!"

The place was full and it had about it that unmistakable air of success which cannot be counterfeited. There were languid couples in full evening dress, Bohemians in corduroy trousers, stout gentlemen in business suits. The band, dressed as devils, dispensed hot music. No doubt about it, *Hell* had caught on.

"We have all kinds here," said the Countess. "That is as it should be, is it not? The gates of Hell are open to all?"

"Except, possibly, to the poor?" Poirot suggested.

The Countess laughed. "Are we not told that it is difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Naturally, then, he should have priority in Hell."

The Professor and Alicia were returning to the table. The Countess got up.

"I must speak to Aristide."

She exchanged some words with the head waiter, a lean Mephistopheles, then went round from table to table, speaking to the guests.

The Professor, wiping his forehead and sipping a glass of wine, remarked, "She is a personality, is she not? People feel it."

He excused himself as he went over to speak to someone at another table.

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Poirot, left alone with the severe Alicia, felt slightly embarrassed as he met the cold blue of her eyes. He recognized that she was actually quite good looking, but he found her distinctly alarming.

"I do not yet know your last name," he murmured.

"Munningham. Dr. Alicia Munningham. You have known Vera in past days, I understand?"

"Twenty years ago it must be."

"I find her a very interesting study," said Dr. Alicia Munningham. "Naturally I am interested in her as the mother of the man I am going to marry, but I am interested in her from the professional standpoint as well."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I am writing a book on criminal psychology. I find the night life of this place very illuminating. We have several criminal types who come here regularly. I have discussed their early life with some of them. Of course you know all about Vera's criminal tendencies—I mean that she steals?"

"Why, yes—I know that," said Poirot, slightly taken aback.

"I call it the magpie complex myself. She takes, you know, always *glittering* things. Never money. Always jewels. I find that as a child she was petted and indulged but very much shielded. Life was unendurably dull for her—dull and safe. Her nature demanded drama—it craved for *punishment*. That is at the root of her indulgence in theft. She wants the *importance*, the *notoriety* of being *punished*!"

Poirot objected, "Her life can surely not have been safe and dull as a member of the *ancien régime* in Russia during the Revolution?"

A look of faint amusement showed in Miss Munningham's pale blue eyes.

"Ah," she said. "A member of the *ancien régime*? She has told you that?"

"She is undeniably an aristocrat," said Poirot staunchly, fighting back certain uneasy memories of the wildly varying accounts of her early life told him by the Countess herself.

"One believes what one wishes to believe," remarked Miss Munningham, casting a professional eye on him.

Poirot felt alarmed. In a moment, he felt, he would be told what was *his* complex. He decided to carry the war into the enemy's camp. He enjoyed the Countess Rossakoff's society partly because of her aristocratic *provenance*, and he was not going to have his enjoyment spoiled by a spectacled little girl with a degree in psychology!

"Do you know what I find astonishing?" he asked.

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Alicia Munningham did not admit in so many words that she did *not* know. She contented herself with looking bored but indulgent.

Poirot went on: "It amazes me that *you*—who are young, and who could look pretty if you took the trouble—well, it amazes me that you do *not* take the trouble! You wear the heavy coat and skirt with the big pockets as though you were going to play the game of golf. But it is not here the golf links, it is the underground cellar with the temperature of seventy one Fahrenheit, and your nose it is hot and shines, but you do not powder it, and the lipstick you put it on your mouth without interest, without emphasizing the curve of the lips! You are a woman, but you do not draw attention to the fact of being a woman. And I say to you '*Why not?*' It is a pity!"

For a moment he had the satisfaction of seeing Alicia Munningham look human. He even saw a spark of anger in her eyes. Then she regained her attitude of smiling contempt.

"My dear M. Poirot," she said, "I'm afraid you're out of touch with the modern ideology. It is *fundamentals* that matter—not the trappings."

She looked up as a dark and very beautiful young man came towards them.

"This is a most interesting type," she murmured with zest. "Paul Varesco! Lives on women and has strange depraved cravings! I want him to tell me more about a nursery governess who looked after him when he was three years old."

A moment or two later she was dancing with the young man. He danced divinely. As they drifted near Poirot's table, Poirot heard her say, "And after the summer at Bognor she gave you a toy crane? A *crane*—yes, that's very suggestive."

For a moment Poirot allowed himself to toy with the speculation that Miss Munningham's interest in criminal types might lead one day to her mutilated body being found in a lonely wood. He did not like Alicia Munningham, but he was honest enough to realize that the reason for his dislike was the fact that she was so palpably unimpressed by Hercule Poirot! His vanity suffered!

Then he saw something that momentarily put Alicia Munningham out of his head.

At a table on the opposite side of the floor sat a fair haired young man. He wore evening dress and his whole demeanour was that of one who lives a life of ease and pleasure. Opposite him sat the right kind of expensive girl. He was gazing at her in a fatuous and foolish manner. Any one seeing them might have murmured: "The idle rich!" Nevertheless, Poirot knew very well that the young man was neither rich nor idle. He was, in fact, Detective

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Inspector Charles Stevens, and it seemed probable to Poirot that Detective Inspector Stevens was here on business . . .

On the following morning Poirot paid a visit to Scotland Yard to his old friend Chief Inspector Japp.

Japp's reception of his tentative enquiries was unexpected.

"You old fox!" said Japp affectionately. "How you get on to these things beats me!"

"But I assure you I know nothing—nothing at all! It is just idle curiosity."

Japp said that Poirot could tell that to the Marines!

"You want to know all about this place *Hell*? Well, on the surface it's just another of these things. It's caught on! They must be making a lot of money, though, of course, the expenses are pretty high. There's a Russian woman ostensibly running it, calls herself the Countess Something or other—"

"I am acquainted with Countess Rossakoff," said Poirot coldly. "We are old friends."

"But she's just a dummy," Japp went on. "She didn't put up the money. It might be the head waiter chap, Aristide Papopolous—he's got an interest in it—but we don't believe it's really his show either. In fact we don't know *whose* show it is!"

"And Inspector Stevens goes there to find out?"

"Oh, you saw Stevens, did you? Lucky young dog landing a job like that at the taxpayer's expense! A fat lot he's found out so far!"

"What do you suspect there is to find out?"

"Dope! Drug racket on a large scale. And the dope's being paid for not in money, but in precious stones."

"Aha?"

"This is how it goes. Lady Blank—or the Countess of Whatnot—finds it hard to get hold of cash—and in any case doesn't want to draw large sums out of the bank. But she's got jewels—family heirlooms sometimes! They're taken along to a place for 'cleaning' or 'resetting'—there the stones are taken out of their settings and replaced with paste. The unset stones are sold over here or on the Continent.

"It's all plain sailing—there's been no robbery, no hue and cry after them. Say sooner or later it's discovered that a certain tiara or necklace is a fake? Lady Blank is all innocence and dismay—can't imagine *how* or *when* the substitution can have taken place—necklace has never been out of her possession! Sends the poor, perspiring police off on wild goose chases after dismissed maids, or doubtful butlers, or suspicious window-cleaners.

"But we're not quite so dumb as these social birds think

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We had several cases come up one after another—*and we found a common factor*—all the women showed signs of dope—nerves, irritability—twitching, pupils of eyes dilated, et cetera. Question was: Where were they getting the dope from and who was running the racket?"

"And the answer, you think, is this place *Hell*?"

"We believe it's the headquarters of the whole racket. We've discovered where the work on the jewellery is done—a place called *Golconda Ltd.*—respectable enough on the surface, high class imitation jewellery. There's a nasty bit of work called Paul Varesco—ah, I see you know him?"

"I have seen him—in *Hell.*"

"That's where I'd like to see him—in the real place! He's as bad as they make 'em—but women—even decent women—eat out of his hand! He's got some kind of connection with *Golconda Ltd.* and I'm pretty sure he's the man behind *Hell.* It's ideal for his purpose—everyone goes there, society women, professional crooks—it's the perfect meeting place."

"You think the exchange—jewels for dope—takes place there?"

"Yes. We know the Golconda side of it—we want the other—the dope side. We want to know who's supplying the stuff and where it's coming from."

"And so far you have no idea?"

"I *think* it's the Russian woman—but we've no evidence. A few weeks ago we thought we were getting somewhere. Varesco went to the Golconda place, picked up some stones there and went straight from there to *Hell.* Stevens was watching him, but he didn't actually see him pass the stuff. When Varesco left we picked him up—*the stones weren't on him.* We raided the club, rounded up everybody! Result, no stones, no dope!"

"A *fiasco*, in fact?"

Japp winced. "You're telling me! Might have got in a bit of a jam, but luckily in the round up we got the Battersea murderer. Pure luck, he was supposed to have got away to Scotland. One of our smart sergeants spotted him from his photos. So all's well that ends well—kudos for us—terrific boost for the club—it's been more packed than ever since!"

Poirot said, "But it does not advance the dope enquiry. There is, perhaps, a place of concealment on the premises?"

"Must be. But we couldn't find it. Went over the place with a toothcomb. And, between you and me, there's been an unofficial search as well—" he winked. "Strictly on the Q.T. Spot of breaking and entering. Not a success, our 'unofficial' man nearly got torn to pieces by that ruddy great dog! It sleeps on the premises."

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"Aha, Cerberus?"

"Yes. Silly name for a dog—to call it after a packet of salt."

"Cerberus," murmured Poirot thoughtfully.

"Suppose you try your hand at it, Poirot," suggested Japp. "It's a pretty problem and worth doing. I hate the drug racket, destroys people body and soul. That really *is* Hell if you like!"

Poirot murmured meditatively, "It would round off things—yes. Do you know what the last labour of Hercules was?"

"No idea."

"*The Capture of Cerberus.* It is appropriate, is it not?"

"Don't know what you're talking about, old man, but remember: '*Dog eats Man*' is news." And Japp leaned back roaring with laughter.

"I wish to speak to you with the utmost seriousness," said Poirot.

The hour was early, the Club as yet nearly empty. The Countess and Poirot sat at a small table near the doorway.

"But I do not feel serious," she protested. "*La petite Alicia*, she is always serious and, *entre nous*, I find it very boring. My poor Niki, what fun will he have? None."

"I entertain for you much affection," continued Poirot steadily. "And I do not want to see you in what is called the jam."

"But it is absurd what you say there! I am on top of the world; the money, it rolls in!"

"You own this place?"

The Countess' eye became slightly evasive.

"Certainly," she replied.

"But you have a partner?"

"Who told you that?" asked the Countess sharply.

"Is your partner Paul Varesco?"

"Oh! Paul Varesco! What an idea!"

"He has a bad—a criminal record. Do you realize that you have criminals frequenting this place?"

The Countess burst out laughing.

"There speaks the *bon bourgeois*! Naturally I realize! Do you not see that that is half the attraction of this place? These young people from Mayfair—they get tired of seeing their own kind round them in the West End. They come here, they see the criminals; the thief, the blackmailer, the confidence trickster—perhaps, even, the murderer—the man who will be in the Sunday papers next week! It is exciting, that—they think they are seeing life! So does the prosperous business man. What a change from his respectable life and his respectable friends! And then, a

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further thrill—there at a table, stroking his moustache, is the Inspector from Scotland Yard—an Inspector in tails!"

"So you knew that?" said Poirot softly.

Her eyes met his and she smiled.

"*Mon cher ami*, I am not so simple as you seem to suppose!"

"Do you also deal in drugs here?"

"Ah, that no!" The Countess spoke sharply. "That would be an abomination!"

Poirot looked at her for a moment or two, then he sighed.

"I believe you," he said. "But in that case it is all the more necessary that you tell me who really owns this place."

"I own it," she snapped.

"On paper, yes. But there is someone behind you."

"Do you know, *mon ami*, I find you altogether too curious? Is he not much too curious, Dou dou?"

Her voice dropped to a coo as she spoke the last words and she threw the duck bone from her plate to the big black hound who caught it with a ferocious snap of the jaws.

"What is it that you call that animal?" asked Poirot, diverted.

"*C'est mon petit Dou dou!*"

"But it is ridiculous, a name like that!"

"But he is adorable! He is a police dog! He can do anything—anything—Wait!"

She rose, looked round her, and suddenly snatched up a plate with a large succulent steak which had just been deposited before a diner at a nearby table. She crossed to the marble niche and put the plate down in front of the dog, at the same time uttering a few words in Russian.

Cerberus gazed in front of him. The steak might not have existed.

"You see? And it is not just a matter of *minutes*! No, he will remain like that for *hours* if need be!"

Then she murmured a word, and like lightning Cerberus bent his long neck and the steak disappeared as though by magic.

Vera Rossakoff flung her arms round the dog's neck and embraced him passionately, rising on tiptoe to do so.

"See how gentle he can be!" she cried. "For me, for Alicia, for his friends—they can do what they like! But one has but to give him the word, and Presto! I can assure you he would tear a—police inspector, for instance—into little pieces! Yes, into little pieces!"

She burst out laughing. "I would have but to say the word—"

Poirot interrupted hastily. He mistrusted the Countess' sense of humour. Inspector Stevens might be in real danger.

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"Thursday night, old man," said Japp. "That's when the balloon goes up. It's Andrew's pigeon, of course—Narcotic Squad—but he'll be delighted to have you horn in. No, thanks, I won't have any of your fancy *sirops*. I have to take care of my stomach. Is that whisky I see over there? That's more the ticket!"

Setting his glass down, he went on, "We've solved the problem, I think. There's another way out of that Club—*and we've found it!*"

"Where?"

"Behind the grill. Part of it swings round."

"But surely you would see—"

"No, old boy. When the raid started, the lights went out—switched off at the main—and it took us a minute or two to get them turned on again. Nobody got out of the front door because it was being watched, but it's clear now that somebody could have nipped out by the secret way with the doings. We've been examining the house behind the Club—and that's how we tumbled to the trick."

"And you propose to do—what?"

Japp winked.

"Let it go according to plan—the police appear, the lights go out—*and somebody's waiting on the other side of that secret door to see who comes through.* This time we've *got* 'em!"

"Why Thursday?"

Again Japp winked.

"We've got the Golconda pretty well taped now. There will be stuff going out of there on Thursday. Lady Cannington's emeralds."

"You permit," said Poirot, "that I, too, make one or two little arrangements?"

Sitting at his usual small table near the entrance on Thursday night Poirot studied his surroundings. As usual *Hell* was going with a swing!

The Countess was even more flamboyantly made up than usual, if that were possible. She was being very Russian tonight, clapping her hands and screaming with laughter. Paul Varesco had arrived. Sometimes he wore faultless evening dress; sometimes, as tonight, he chose to present himself in a kind of *apache* get-up, tightly buttoned coat, scarf round the neck. He looked vicious and attractive.

Detaching himself from a stout, middle aged woman plastered with diamonds, Paul leaned over Alicia Munningham who was sitting at a table writing busily in a little notebook and asked her to dance. The stout woman scowled at Alicia and looked at Varesco with adoring eyes.

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There was no adoration in Miss Munningham's eyes. They gleamed with pure scientific interest, and Poirot caught fragments of their conversation as they danced past him. She had progressed beyond the nursery governess and was now seeking information about the matron at Paul's preparatory school.

When the music stopped, she sat down by Poirot looking happy and excited.

"Most interesting," she said. "Varesco will be one of the most important cases in my book. The symbolism is unmistakable. Trouble about the vests for instance—for vest read *hair shirt* with all its associations—and the whole thing becomes quite plain. You may say that he's definitely a criminal type, but a cure *can* be effected—"

"That she can reform a rake," said Poirot, "has always been one of woman's dearest illusions!"

Alicia Munningham looked at him coldly. "There is nothing *personal* about this, M. Poirot."

"There never is," said Poirot. "It is always pure disinterested altruism—but the object of it is usually an attractive member of the opposite sex. Are you interested, for instance in where *I* went to school, or what was the attitude of the matron to *me*?"

"You are not a criminal type," said Miss Munningham.

"Do you know a criminal type when you see one?"

"Certainly I do."

Professor Liskeard joined them. He sat down by Poirot.

"Are you talking about criminals? You should study the criminal code of Hammurabi, M. Poirot. 1800 B.C. Most interesting. *The man who is caught stealing during a fire shall be thrown into the fire.*"

He stared pleasurably ahead of him towards the electric grill.

"And there are older, Summerian laws. *If a wife hateth her husband and saith unto him, 'Thou art not my husband' they shall throw her into the river.* Cheaper and easier than the divorce court. But if a husband says that to his wife he only has to pay her a certain measure of silver. Nobody throws *him* in the river."

"The same old story," said Alicia Munningham. "One law for the man and one for the woman."

"Women, of course, have a greater appreciation of monetary value," said the Professor thoughtfully. "You know," he added, "I like this place. I come here most evenings. I don't have to pay. The Countess arranged that—very nice of her—in consideration of my having advised her about the decorations, she says. Not that they're anything to do with me really, and naturally she and the artist have got everything *quite* wrong. I hope nobody will ever know I had the remotest connection with the dreadful

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things. I should never live it down. But she's a wonderful woman—rather like a Babylonian, I always think. The Babylonians were good women of business, you know—"

The Professor's words were drowned in a sudden chorus. The word "Police" was heard—women rose to their feet, there was a babel of sound. The lights went out and so did the electric grill.

As an undertone to the turmoil, the Professor's voice went on tranquilly reciting various excerpts from the laws of Hammurabi.

When the lights went on again Hercule Poirot was halfway up the wide, shallow steps. The police officers by the door saluted him, and he passed out into the street and strolled to the corner. Just round the corner, pressed against the wall was a small and odoriferous man with a red nose. He spoke in an anxious, husky whisper.

"I'm 'ere, guv'nor. Time for me to do my stuff?"

"Yes. Go on."

"There's a nawful lot of coppers about!"

"That's all right. They've been told about you."

"I 'ope they won't interfere, that's all?"

"They will not interfere. You're sure you can accomplish what you have set out to do? The animal in question is both large and fierce."

"'E won't be fierce to me," said the little man confidently. "Not with what I've got 'ere! Any dog'll follow me to Hell for it!"

"In this case," murmured Hercule Poirot, "he has to follow you *out* of Hell!"

In the small hours of the morning the telephone rang. Poirot picked up the receiver.

Japp's voice said, "You asked me to ring you."

"Yes, indeed. *Eh bien?*"

"No dope—we got the emeralds."

"Where?"

"In Professor Liskeard's pocket."

"Professor Liskeard?"

"Surprises you, too? Frankly, I don't know what to think! He looked as astonished as a baby, stared at them, said he hadn't the faintest idea how they got in his pocket, and dammit I believe he was speaking the truth! Varesco could have slipped them into his pocket easily enough in the blackout. I can't see a man like old Liskeard being mixed up in this sort of business. He belongs to all these high falutin' societies; why, he's even connected with the British Museum! The only thing he ever spends money on is books, and musty old second-hand books at that. No, he doesn't

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fit. I'm beginning to think we're wrong about the whole thing—there never has been any dope in that Club."

"Oh yes, there has, my friend, it was there tonight. Tell me, did no one come out through your secret way?"

"Yes, Prince Henry of Scandenberg and his equerry—he only arrived in England yesterday. Vitamian Evans, the Cabinet Minister. Lady Beatrice Viner was the last—she's getting married the day after tomorrow to the priggish young Duke of Leominster. I don't believe any of that lot were mixed up in this."

"You believe rightly. Nevertheless, the dope *was* in the Club, and someone took it out of the Club."

"Who did?"

"I did, *mon ami*," said Poirot softly.

He replaced the receiver, cutting off Japp's spluttering noises, as a bell trilled out.

He went and opened the front door. The Countess Rossakoff sailed in.

"If it were not that we are, alas, too old, how compromising this would be!" she exclaimed. "You see, I have come as you told me to do in your note. There is, I think, a policeman behind me, but he can stay in the street. And now, my friend, what is it?"

Poirot gallantly relieved her of her fox furs.

"Why did you put those emeralds in Professor Liskeard's pocket?" he demanded.

The Countess's eyes opened wide.

"Naturally, it was in *your* pocket I meant to put the emeralds!"

"Oh, in *my* pocket?"

"Certainly. I cross hurriedly to the table where you usually sit—but the lights they are out, and I suppose by inadvertence I put them in the Professor's pocket."

"And why did you wish to put stolen emeralds in my pocket?"

"It seemed to me—I had to think quickly, you understand—the best thing to do!"

"Really, Vera, you are *impossible*!"

"But, dear friend, *consider*! The police arrive, the lights go out, our little private arrangement for the patrons who must not be embarrassed, *and a hand takes my bag off the table.* I snatch it back, but I feel through the velvet something hard inside. I slip my hand in, I find what I know by touch to be jewels, and I comprehend at once who has put them there!"

"Oh, you do?"

"Of course I do! It is that *salaud*! It is that lizard, that monster, that double-faced, double-crossing, squirming adder of a pig's son, Paul Varesco."

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" The man who is your partner in *Hell* ? "

" Yes, yes, it is he who owns the place, who puts up the money. Until now I do not betray him—I can keep faith, me ! But now that he double-crosses me, that he tries to embroil me with the police—ah ! Now I will spit his name out—yes, *spit* it out ! "

" Calm yourself," said Poirot, " and come with me into the next room."

He opened the door. It was a small room and seemed for a moment to be completely filled with DOG. Cerberus had looked outsize even in the spacious premises of *Hell.* In the tiny dining room of Poirot's service flat there seemed nothing else but Cerberus in the room. There was also, however, the small odoriferous man.

" We've turned up 'ere according to plan, guv'nor," said the little man in a husky voice.

" Dou dou ! " screamed the Countess. " My angel Dou dou ! "

Cerberus beat the floor with his tail—but he did not move.

" Let me introduce you to Mr. William Higgs," shouted Poirot, above the thunder of Cerberus' tail. " A master in his profession. During the *brouhaha* tonight," went on Poirot, " Mr. Higgs induced Cerberus to follow him up out of *Hell.*"

" *You* induced him ? " The Countess stared incredulously at the small rat-like figure. " But *how* ? *How ?* "

Mr. Higgs dropped his eyes bashfully.

" 'Ardly like to say afore a lady. But there's things no dogs won't resist. Follow me anywhere a dog will if I want 'im to. Of course you understand it won't work the same way with bitches—no, that's different, that is."

The Countess Rossakoff turned on Poirot.

" But why ? *Why ?* "

Poirot said slowly, " A dog trained for the purpose will carry an article in his mouth until he is commanded to loose it. He will carry it if need be for hours. Will you now tell your dog to drop what he holds ? "

Vera Rossakoff stared, turned, and uttered two crisp words.

The great jaws of Cerberus opened. Then, it was really alarming, *Cerberus' tongue seemed to drop out of his mouth . . .*

Poirot stepped forward. He picked up a small package encased in pink, spongebag rubber. He unwrapped it. Inside it was a packet of white powder.

" What is it ? " the Countess demanded sharply.

Poirot said softly, " *Cocaine.* Such a small quantity, it would seem—but enough to be worth thousands of pounds to those willing to pay for it . . . Enough to bring ruin and misery to several hundred people . . ."

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The Countess caught her breath. She cried out, " And you think that *I*—but it is not so ! I swear to you it is not so ! In the past I have amused myself with the jewels, the *bibelots*, the little curiosities—it all helps one to live, you understand. And what I feel is, why not ? Why should one person own a thing more than another ? "

" Just what I feel about dogs," Mr. Higgs chimed in.

" You have no sense of right or wrong," said Poirot sadly to the Countess.

She went on, " But *drugs—that, no !* For there one causes misery, pain, degeneration ! I had no idea—no faintest idea—that my so charming, so innocent, so delightful little *Hell* was being used for *that* purpose ! "

" I agree with you about dope," said Mr. Higgs. " Doping of grey'ounds—that's dirty, that is ! I wouldn't never 'ave nothing to do with anything like that, and I never *'ave* 'ad ! "

" But say you believe me, my friend," implored the Countess.

" But of course I believe you ! Have I not taken time and trouble to convict the real organizer of the dope racket. Have I not performed the last Labour of Hercules and brought Cerberus up from Hell to prove my case ? For I tell you this, I do not like to see my friends framed—yes, *framed*—for it was *you* who were intended to take the rap if things went wrong ! It was in *your* handbag the emeralds would have been found, and if any one had been clever enough, like me, to suspect a hiding place in the mouth of a savage dog—*eh bien*, he is *your* dog, is he not ? Even if he *has* accepted *la petite Alicia* and obeys her orders also !

" Yes, you may well open your eyes ! From the first I did not like that young lady with her scientific jargon and her coat and skirt with the big pockets. Yes, *pockets*. Unnatural that any woman should be so disdainful of her appearance ! And what does she say to me—that it is fundamentals that count ! Aha ! what is fundamental is pockets. Pockets in which she can carry drugs and take away jewels—a little exchange easily made whilst she is dancing with her accomplice whom she pretends to regard as a psychological case. Ah, but what a cover ! No one suspects the earnest, the scientific psychologist with a medical degree and spectacles.

" She can smuggle in drugs, and induce her rich patients to form the habit, and put up the money for a night club and arrange that it shall be run by someone with—shall we say, a little weakness in her past ! But she despises Hercule Poirot, she thinks she can deceive him with her talk of nursery governesses and vests ! *Eh bien*, I am ready for her. The lights go off. Quickly I rise from my table and go to stand by Cerberus. In the darkness I hear her come. She opens his mouth and forces in the package, and I—

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delicately, unfelt by her, I snip with a tiny pair of scissors a little piece from her sleeve."

Dramatically he produced a sliver of material.

"You observe—the identical checked tweed—and I will give it to Japp to fit it back where it belongs—and make the arrest—and say how clever once more has been Scotland Yard."

The Countess Rossakoff stared at him in stupefaction. Suddenly she let out a wail like a foghorn.

"But my Niki—my Niki. This will be terrible for him—" She paused. "Or do you think not?"

"There are a lot of other girls in America," said Hercule Poirot.

"And but for you his mother would be in prison—in *prison*—with her hair cut off—sitting in a cell—and smelling of disinfectant! Ah, but you are wonderful—*wonderful.*"

Surging forward she clasped Poirot in her arms and embraced him with Slavonic fervour. Mr. Higgs looked on appreciatively. The dog Cerberus beat his tail upon the floor.

Into the midst of this scene of rejoicing came the trill of a bell.

"Japp!" exclaimed Poirot, disengaging himself from the Countess' arms.

"It would be better, perhaps, if I went into the other room," said the Countess.

She slipped through the connecting door. Poirot started towards the door to the hall.

"Guv'nor," wheezed Mr. Higgs anxiously, "better look at yourself in the glass, 'adn't you?"

Poirot did so and recoiled. Lipstick and mascara ornamented his face in a fantastic medley.

"If that's Mr. Japp from Scotland Yard, 'e'd think the worst—sure to," said Mr. Higgs.

He added, as the bell pealed again, and Poirot strove feverishly to remove crimson grease from the points of his moustache, "What do yer want *me* to do—'ook it, too? What about this 'ere 'Ell 'Ound?"

"If I remember rightly," said Hercule Poirot, "Cerberus returned to Hell."

"Just as you like," said Mr. Higgs. "As a matter of fact I've taken a kind of fancy to 'im . . . Still, 'e's not the kind I'd like to pinch—not permanent—too noticeable, if you know what I mean. And think what he'd cost me in shin of beef or 'orseflesh!"

A week later Miss Lemon brought a bill to her employer.

"Excuse me, M. Poirot. Is it in order for me to pay this? *Leonora, Florist. Red Roses.* Eleven pounds, eight shillings and sixpence. Sent to Countess Vera Rossakoff, *Hell.*"

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As the hue of red roses, so were the cheeks of Hercule Poirot. He blushed, blushed to the eyeballs.

"Perfectly in order, Miss Lemon. A little—er, tribute—to—to an occasion. The Countess' son has just become engaged in America—to the daughter of his employer, a steel magnate. Red roses are—I seem to remember, her favourite flowers."

"Quite," said Miss Lemon. "They're very expensive this time of year."

Hercule Poirot drew himself up.

"There are moments," he said, "when one does not economize."

Humming a little tune, he went out of the door. His step was light, almost sprightly. Miss Lemon stared after him. Her filing system was forgotten. All her feminine instincts were aroused.

"Good gracious," she murmured. "I wonder . . . Really—at *his* age! . . . Surely not . . ."

* * *

SEA MUSIC

Are there sounds in the sea
Fifty fathoms deep?
No, there is not a sigh
There, but like sheep
Valley-wandering on the mountainside,
Soft as the wool of sheep collide
Sister-sounding streams
In dumb clash of dreams . . .

Yet, there is music there,
Music the flounders hear,
Music lapping the ear
Of the sea anemone:
Music that flows around
Silence deep-fringed with sound,
Music whose still, bright curl
Sleeps in the oyster pearl . . .

Strange is the thing it tells
Lovely and small
How a God once did dwell
In the sea's hall,
How his harp hanging there
Now he is gone
Strung with his rainbow hair
Weeps all alone.

W. J. TURNER, 1889-1946

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CARAVAN

Give to Me the Life I Love—

It was a sign and symbol that gypsy fire. Sign and symbol of the shifting tent, the fresh morning journey into the blue unknown, the free wild wandering . . . partridge eggs in the furze clump beside the byway; the snare, the stealthy shot, the bivouac; fiddle, dance, and song . . .

JAMES YOXALL, *The Rommany Stone*

Let the Lave Go By Me—

Where do the gypsies come from?
The gypsies come from Egypt.
The fiery sun begot them,
Their dam was the desert dry . . .

What did the gypsies do there?
They built a tomb for Pharaoh,
They built a tomb for Pharaoh,
So tall it touched the sky . . .

What do the gypsies do now?
They follow the Sun, their father,
They follow the Sun, their father,
They know not whither nor why.
Whatever they find they take it,
And if it's a law they break it.
So never you talk to a gypsy,
Or look in a gypsy's eye.

H. H. BASHFORD

Give the Jolly Heaven Above—

"Is that young female your wife, young man?" said Mrs. Chikno . . .

"No," said I, "she is not my wife."

"Then I will not visit with her," said Mrs. Chikno; "I countenance nothing in the roving line."

"What do you mean by the roving line?" I demanded.

"What do I mean by the roving line? . . . When ryes and rawnies lives together in dingles, without being certificated, I calls such behaviour being tolerably deep in the roving line . . ."

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"It is hard that people may not live in dingles together without being suspected of doing wrong," said I.

"So it is," said Mrs. Petulengro, interposing; "and, to tell you the truth, I am altogether surprised at the illiberality of my sister's remarks . . . I am suspicious of nobody, not even of my own husband, whom some people would think I have a right to be suspicious of, seeing that on his account I once refused a lord . . ."

"Meklis," said Mrs. Chikno, "pray drop all that . . . I believe, after all, it was something in the roving and uncertificated line."

"In whatever line it was," said Mrs. Petulengro, "the offer was a good one. The young duke—for he was not only a lord, but a duke too—offered to keep me a fine carriage, and to make me his second wife; for it is true that he had another who was old and stout, though mighty rich, and highly good natured; so much so, indeed, that the young lord assured me that she would have no manner of objection to the arrangement . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Chikno, "I see, what I before thought, that it was altogether in the uncertificated line."

GEORGE BORROW, 1803-1881, *The Romany Rye*

And the Byway Nigh Me—

The pied snake to the rifted rock,
The buck to the stony plain,
And the Romany lass to the Romany lad,
And both to the road again . . .

RUDYARD KIPLING, 1865-1936, *The Gypsy Trail*

Bed in the Bush with Stars to See—

Sweet little God, I beseech thee to grant me everything I ask, because thou art beautiful, high and mighty.

If thou lettest me steal a loaf, brandy, a hen, a goose, a sheep, a pig, or a horse I will give thee a big candle.

If I have stolen anything, and the gentiles enter my tent to discover the stolen property and find nothing, I will give thee two big candles.

If the officers of the law enter my tent, and having searched it and found nothing, depart in peace, I will give thee three big candles.

Because thou art my sweet little golden God.

Prayer of a Rumanian Gypsy Highwayman

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Bread I Dip in the River—

The gypsies lit their fires by the chalk-pit gate anew,
And the hoppled horses supped in the further dusk and dew ;
The gnats flocked round the smoke like idlers as they were
And through the goss and bushes the owls began to churr . . .

The gypsies lolled and gossiped, and ate their stolen swedes,
Made merry with mouth-organs, worked toys with piths of reeds :
The old wives puffed their pipes, nigh as black as their hair,
And not one of them all seemed to know the name of care.

EDMUND BLUNDEN, *The Idlers*

There's the Life for a Man Like Me—

It is a curious experience to sit with the gypsies round their pot in the twilight and to take your chance with them regarding what comes out of the pot on the end of your fork. For the cauldron is literally a lucky dip, and makes no allowance for finicky choosings. You plunge in your fork and whatever may happen to be speared upon it falls to your portion ; you can make no guess beforehand what it is likely to be, for the brown bubbling stew gives away no secrets. But when you have impaled your piece and dragged it forth on to your plate . . . then experience plus an elementary knowledge of anatomy will generally solve the riddle.

Sometimes, however, the diagnosis is less easy, for the stew may contain such assorted ingredients as hedgehogs, hares, moorhens, grey squirrels, lapwings, field fares—which are excellent—and many small birds, with all kinds of herbs and vegetables, mushrooms, truffles, and the late autumn fungi which we call blue legs . . .

So you see . . . when you sup with them it is best on the whole to put aside all uncomfortable speculations—in fact to " open your mouth and shut your eyes and eat what the good Lord sends you." Otherwise you are apt to remember your Macbeth and the Weird Sisters' recipe, and to read into the morphology of even the most delicious morsel a suggestion of fenny snake or newt's eye, lizard's leg and birth-strangled babe's finger. That way nausea lies.

JOHN MOORE, *The Blue Field*

—There's the Life for Ever

What care I for my house and my land?
What care I for my money, O?
What care I for my new-wedded lord?
I'm off with the wraggle-taggle gypsies, O.

Author Unknown

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THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Would nobody ever believe him ?

by MICHAEL FOSTER

WHEN I got off the train they would know me. But I hoped they wouldn't know what I was.

If they knew what had happened to me, they'd better not show it. With a nerve of rage knotting and crawling sullenly somewhere behind my eyes, I was ready for the first virtuous smirk. They'd better leave me alone. They'd better keep out of my way.

That quivering sickness of defiance had been with me all the way from town, and as I began recognizing landmarks out across the vale country my throat kept getting dryer and dryer. I was luckier than I deserved. There was nobody except an old porter on the platform, and with my two suitcases I was the only person who got off the branch-line local.

My clothes were still extremely good, and my suitcases were expensive. The guard from the steps of the weary old coach behind me tossed down a bundle of evening papers from the city; they hit the splintery platform with a dusty thump. A boy was waiting there for them, and I looked at him. That was one of the jobs I had had when I was about his age. And I suppose that I had looked something like this youngster—sunburned, needing a haircut, and with a clear new world and the future in his eyes.

Seeing me stand there, watching him, the boy said, " Can I help you, sir ? "

" No," I said.

But the country wind felt good on my face again. It had come to meet me.

And then I saw Mrs. Meigs. She had been my mother's best friend. In a floppy straw hat she was waving frantically from an ancient car, and then heavily awkward with haste she was climbing out backwards but still trying to wave and look over her shoulder at the same time. I was in for it now, but I realized that now was as good a time as any. Carrying my suitcases I walked slowly towards her.

" Why, Charlie Andrews ! " she said. " You've come home for your holidays ! We've all been wondering if you ever would."

" I could do with a little rest," I said shortly. Let them think

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whatever they wanted to. But you could never really tell what people were thinking. I put down my suitcases to shake hands. That wasn't enough; she hugged me, too. She is a big woman, and the hug had strength in it.

Holding me off at arm's length, Mrs. Meigs said, " You do look tired. Really peaked. Your mother would be worried."

The train was pulling out, making a lot of noise, so all I had to do was pretend to mutter something. But that didn't make any difference to Mrs. Meigs, she didn't try to hear me. Her weathered face was just shining.

" — so I'll do the worrying about you while you're here," she was saying. " And you'll sleep better with old friends all round you."

Looking quickly beyond her shoulder—the words ' old friends ' hit the raw nerve—I saw the little High Street of Pimpernel, with the late afternoon heat shimmering on its pavement. Nothing had changed much—most of the old houses in the market square had been newly painted, and on the other side of the street the front of Spindler's shop had been redecorated to make it look more like a smart town shop. After Town everything seemed very small and old, very countrified, but the sky was enormous. Cars and farm wagons irregularly lined the street, exactly as I had seen it last, and the same looking few people were walking along the pavements. Occasionally someone would walk with diagonal leisure across the nearly empty street. Beyond the western edges of town, away out across the vale farms, the low range of bare hills crouched above the purple line of the moors.

" Are you going to stay at the *White Hart* or at the old cottage ? " Mrs. Meigs was asking.

" The cottage," I said, looking sideways at the cobwebbed telephone box, at the side of the booking office under a sign:

For Hire Car
'Phone 228
Potter's Garage

" Charlie, you get straight into that car of mine," Mrs. Meigs said. " The idea! Has twelve years made you forget we're neighbours ? "

Reluctantly, but perhaps not showing it, I put my suitcases in the back.

Rattling briskly up the road, she said, " Have you got a key ? "

" Yes," I said.

Driving along, Mrs. Meigs gossiped cheerfully, bringing me up to date on all the news. Most of the people of my own generation were married now and had children, but when she came to talk of recent marriages she was mentioning names I only vaguely

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remembered as belonging to small children when I was at the grammar school.

In front of the wind battered old cottage on the edge of the town she stopped the car in a sifting radiance of following dust.

" You go in and get settled," she said. " You're home now, Charlie."

I carried my suitcases up the weed grown pathway. My feet remembered the uneven bricks. The paint of the cottage was peeling and sad from the suns of many summers, and time and the burdens of snow had sagged the roof. At the warped front door I had difficulty in using my key, but the lock finally gave with a rusty and grudging welcome.

The place had been let from time to time, but it had been empty for more than a year now, and with the cracked green window blinds pulled down the darkness inside smelled of forgotten days and nights. The same stairs creaked under my grown up feet and they too told me, but wearily and with dryness, that I had come home. In the cramped little upstairs landing I turned to the west room, mine when I was a boy, not even looking yet at the other room which had been my parents'. Setting my suitcases down on the bare floor I just stood there for a minute with my eyes closed, sick with resentment that I had to come back here.

I sat down on the edge of the bed and looked round. On the other side of the room the faded wallpaper showed some narrow cleaner lines of pattern and some nail-holes where I had built shelves to hold my books and the model ship I had made on winter nights, and the various odd little grubby treasures that a boy whose family is poor gathers for himself but changes from year to year as he grows up. Some tenant had pulled down the shelves.

Often I had lain warm and safe in this bed while the winter gales made lost war songs at the black pane; and often, when the summer moon turned the cornfields to silver and black, I had lain here awake with a boy's long dreams of the future and the world and the cities beyond the vale. I would hear my mother stirring in the other room, getting ready for bed alone, because my father was an insurance agent and most of the week was visiting people all over the North, and at night going to bed as lonely in some dingy hotel room in some other little town. I . . . I was almost glad that they were gone, both those gentle poor people. They had believed in me so.

It was bitter, bitter as the taste of stale dust, to have to come back here. I was sick, with a deep sickness of self, with a weary hatred of the big city world that had rejected me.

As one night a few days ago I had sat on the edge of the bed in a furnished room, I here again faced the fact that I was a failure.

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That night, in an ugly room where many failures had sat looking at the wall, I had realized that I had only one place left in the world to go, a roof I didn't have to pay for. So now, I had come home with enough money to live on for a few weeks if I were careful, and some expensive clothes left from the good days, the easy time when I had been on the way up.

Without bothering to open my suitcases just yet, I started to look round the house. The kitchen, with its dull green paint smoked above the stove where mother had done such wonders on sometimes so little, still held the echoes, if you listened softly, of laughter and of love, of suppers by lamplight with the snow upon the sill. Back in the sitting room again, I drew up one of the green blinds. It made a harsh brief sound and then the gentle silence came back again. I stood looking at the shabby old furniture, the best they had ever been able to buy, and at my mother's second hand piano. Sometimes, not very often, she would play in the evening—nothing grand, just old tunes as worn as the piano itself. She would sit very upright, frowning a little at the mistakes her tired fingers made. I walked over and touched one key. It sounded dusty, remote, and out of tune.

I turned quickly away, because Mrs. Meigs and her husband were coming up the front path. Henry was carrying a tray, heavily stacked and covered with a white linen cloth, and Mrs. Meigs had some clean sheets over her arm.

" Next to plain home cooking a good tightly made bed is important to the soul of man," she said while Henry set the tray down and shook my hand. " I'm going to see to you while you're here, Charlie. As your mother would want me to. So that you get a real rest before you go back to that office of yours in town."

I shrank inside myself, but they didn't notice anything was wrong. They stayed only a little while, just long enough for Mrs. Meigs to make my bed upstairs while Henry and I stood about in the sitting room. Henry had always been a silent little man, but there were old times in his faded eyes, and remembrance of my father.

" It seems lonely here nowadays, Charlie," he said with social effort. " What do you think of the old place, after all these years ? "

" Well, I've just been looking round the house and thinking "—with a sort of fierce desperate honesty I thought that now was the time to get it over—" thinking what an awful failure I've made of things."

" Heh ! " he said, and with a knuckly forefinger poked me in the ribs. " Do your father good to hear you say that. He always was a great one for a joke instead of bragging. Many's the time I've

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heard him—" He broke off and gazed out of the window for a minute, strangely and I think deeply uncomfortable. Then he summoned up some more words : " Of course, I suppose everybody gets tired sometimes, son, and thinks of the things he might have done and failed to do. The sins of omission. But you successful men can't fool your old friends, Charlie. You oughtn't to try. It makes us feel sad."

So he thought I was guilty of that form of insincerity, did he, that false humble vain glory ? I opened my mouth to tell him, straight out and savagely ; and then didn't. What was the use ? Henry and Mrs. Meigs believed in me, too.

After they had left, with many good nights, I lifted the white cloth and looked at the tray. There were four or five covered dishes—I could smell the rich brown gravy of Mrs. Meigs' famous steak pudding—and besides supper she had brought a jug of coffee, homemade bread and jam and some eggs so I could cook my breakfast. She had remembered everything, even a pitcher of farm cream and some sugar. I took the tray to the kitchen, but I didn't eat immediately. Unbolting the back door, I walked out over the unkempt lawn to the grapevine in the conservatory against the garden wall.

For years, in the cool of Saturday evenings my father had carried buckets of water from the pump to pour round the roots of the vine, his patient shirt-sleeved figure making many trips in the summer twilight. I could still hear the rusty earnest sound of the pump. But now the grape was nearly dead, only a few bunches of big leaves, some of them pale, sprouting in clumps from the heavy and twisted vines. Somewhere a peewit called across the sunset fields ; from far away in the other direction I heard the evening voices of children in some living garden. Stooping, I pulled up a dandelion which had grown beside the bench. It had been a long time since neighbours had sat here talking and drinking tea with my mother.

And perhaps because I was poorer now than any of them had ever been, emptier of hope or courage and more lonely, I wondered what had become of Mary Calvert. She was the only one I could remember here—she and her mother—who would know about the dry throat of desperation, the empty hands which had nothing to reach for.

Looking back with a man's discernment, now that I was older, I knew that she had been the most startling girl in the school : shyly dark and too thin, with a silent wild beauty such as I had not seen since, anywhere. That young girl and her mother, taller and as silent, had been very poor and proud in a tumble-down house on the other side of town, I think sometimes without enough to eat.

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But at the time, I suppose I hadn't thought very much about her. Whenever I had a date it was with Marjorie, an excitable blonde whose father worked in the bank, or with Helen, or Elaine, all of whom I'd heard were placid young matrons by now. Mrs. Meigs hadn't mentioned Mary Calvert.

When I was a boy Mary's father was a town character—a big florid man who was always away for long periods, months at a time or even a year sometimes, on one wildgoose get-rich scheme after another. I suppose he sent some money home when he could. Occasionally he would come back from places like California or Melbourne or Mexico with his large booming important voice, and you'd see him about town for a while, talking to people in the street. Then he'd be gone once more . . .

Mary Calvert would know about desperation, all right. But one night I had boasted to her, under the winter stars, and if I were to meet her now—wherever she was—I knew I'd see myself in hell before I let her suspect the trouble I was in. I suppose probably it was the bragging I had done that called her to mind in that dry and bitter moment down by the grapevine. And yet, when I thought, I couldn't really remember very much about her. She was a couple of years behind me at school, so she had never been in any of my classes. She was just a girl that had always been there in the background, ever since I could remember.

Mrs. Calvert did plain sewing for the better-off women of the town, but at one time she must even have had to take in washing; because my first recollection of Mary gave me the picture of a child pulling an old toboggan through the snow with a heavy wicker laundry basket rounded over the top with a clean sheet tucked in. A small bundled figure quietly hauling a burden through the blue dusk of a winter evening, past the lighted windows of the big Georgian houses at the top of the High Street. I remember that I stopped to help her lift her load over a place where a big tree-root had bulged the pavement up into a ridge. As if that gave her some claim on me, during the following windy spring she would nod vigorously and mysteriously to me across the barren playground when she caught my eye; but I couldn't be bothered with a little and humble junior, so after a while she gave it up. She was always painfully clean while the rest of us could afford to be muddily careless, perhaps because she knew at first hand the work it took to make people's clothes and wash them. She looked lonely, even in the middle of a crowd of little girls.

Later on at the grammar school I used to see her walking along the corridors in her crisp homemade dresses, somehow more delicately becoming than other girls' shop clothes, and with her dark

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hair all cloudy about her thin face. Sometimes I would say hello, but at that self conscious age she would only smile faintly and hurry on. I was a house captain by that time and editor of our school magazine.

The time I did that great bit of boasting was one January evening in my last year at the grammar school. Old Mr. Fowler had just relieved me at the hotel where I did odd jobs from teatime to nine o'clock, registering in the occasional commercial travellers and helping them carry their sample-cases upstairs. When I came out of the door with my schoolbooks under my arm Mary was walking quickly by, along the dim pavement.

We walked along together and after a while she said, very low, "I hear you're going away to university. To the South." Her voice capitalized that word, that magic word which means the dreamed-of great world to a country childhood.

To the other girls, whose fathers were substantial men in the town, I had been decently modest about my plans. But to her, who had so humbly little, who looked up at me with wistful admiring eyes, I boasted boldly, with the raw rebellion of adolescence.

"Yes," I said. "I'm going to get out of this one horse town and I'm never coming back, either. There's no future here, not the kind of a future I want. I'm going to be part of the big world. You watch me.."

Clumsily, I knew I was betraying all the shining anxious thoughts I'd had walking home alone under the stars that winter; and I was relieved when this strange and disturbing girl turned off at her corner and walked steadily away under the bare branches . . .

Well, it had come partly true, for a while. Working my way through university, I couldn't come home because I had to count too much on my holiday job in a big hotel, and the railway fare for Christmas was out of the question. And after my mother and then father died while I was studying law, I never had made another trip back. Until now . . . But the crudely swaggering youth, loud and boasting, that I had been to one quiet girl—that memory became the most bitter dreg of the moment. Everybody else—I could damn their eyes and stare them down, if I had to. Mary Calvert, I thought, I could never face again.

Turning from the little conservatory, I walked slowly back to the cottage. It was dark by the time I ate my supper at the kitchen table. Mrs. Meigs had stewed some Victoria plums for dessert.

When I finally went up to my room I found the clean sheets had been left turned back invitingly on my bed and my clothes had been unpacked and put away. My laundry was in a pillow-slip on the floor of the cupboard where my two other suits and

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overcoat had been hung. Strangely, when I didn't expect it, sleep came like another old friend in the country silence.

The next morning I was having a cigarette after breakfast when Mrs. Meigs came in, cheerful as autumn cider.

" Let's make out a shopping list now, Charlie," she said. " You won't want to go down to the shops today, everybody would be stopping you in the street, and besides there'll be too much to carry on foot. I'm going down in the car, and I'll do your shopping at the same time."

She spent a happy worried twenty minutes writing down on a piece of paper all the things she thought I'd need, mentioning everything to herself as she wrote it and talking away sixty to the dozen at the same time to me, more neighbourhood gossip all mixed up absent-mindedly with scraps of easy recipes and household hints for a bachelor who was going to cook for himself. A woman loves a chance to start with empty shelves and fill them up.

"—And if you get too much salt in something you're stewing, just drop in a peeled raw potato," she finished. " And then lift the potato out and throw it away. See you later, Charlie." And out she sailed.

She was gone a long time, probably spreading the word—she would enjoy that immensely, too—and when she came back I was dusting the furniture with one of my soiled shirts that I had hauled out of the pillow-slip. It was good to have something definite that needed doing.

I carried the shopping in from her car, and then handed packages and tins to her while she stood on a kitchen chair putting them up on the shelves.

" Now nobody's going to bother you, Charlie. In fact, hardly anybody, really, knows you're here yet," she said innocently. " I've saved you all that."

But during the afternoon the baker called to see if I wanted regular orders again ; a Mrs. Staples, whom I didn't know, arrived to collect my pillow-slip full of washing and stopped for a chat ; a boy from a farm down the lane brought me a jug of milk, some country butter, and stopped to tell me all about how things were going at the school. While I was upstairs I heard cautious footsteps on the front path and went down to find a vase of cut flowers and a hot blackberry and apple pie sitting there but nobody in sight ; and towards evening there was a thump against the door and there was our local paper.

Unfolding it to the inky earnest first page I saw, first thing, a story headed : *Noted Son Comes Home For Visit*, and my name jumped out at me. Cursing inwardly, I read it. It started,

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" *Charles H. Andrews, brilliant London lawyer whom all will remember as a Pimpernel boy, has returned to our midst to occupy the old family house for a brief holiday away from his pressing legal affairs—*" and it went on from there. It was accurate enough, as far as it went. That after being called to the Bar I joined the legal staff of *Consolidated Utilities Company*; a mention of my war service as a Naval lawyer; and with a rhetorical flourish it said that three years ago I resigned my position with *Utilities* to open my own law offices in London with a partner. The thing fondly breathed success and money, and I put the paper down with a trapped feeling.

After supper there was another knock on the door, and this time it was Tom Middleton. He had played rugger with me at school, and I had already heard that he was now practising medicine locally. His car was parked at the gate.

" Hello, Charlie," he said. " Mrs. Meigs has cautioned everybody you're not to be disturbed, but I'm out on my evening round and I couldn't drive by your lighted window. Besides, I'm a privileged character around here."

Beaming desperately, I took him into the sitting room and we started one of those nostalgic conversations, much teasing and laughter and all too hearty, trying anxiously to pick up threads of friendship where they had been dropped years ago. It was fairly grim for me, but I talked louder than he did, and laughed more. Pimpernel is too small to have a chamber of commerce but we do have a club, and before long he told me I was going to speak at their luncheon next week.

For a minute I felt just wariness, just sullen resentment; my head was down, against the world. But in face of the homely kindnesses of these neighbours, my people—somehow without my knowing it, my attitude was changing, betraying me. In some obscure and painful way, I was making a new adjustment to my town, which was trying to show me that it liked me still, and wanted me. The ugly sense of defiance was beginning to melt a little, I suppose, in spite of myself. I had an odd humbleness of wanting to put myself straight, at least with my nearest friends here.

But when I answered Tom about the luncheon, I was watching his face for the least sign at which I could take offence. Trying with anguish to be honest, yes; but still watching for that first smirk.

" Tom, I can't do it," I said. " I just can't do it. I've come home worn out and knocked flatter than a pancake. I'm here because it's the only place I could come for a breathing space, to pull myself together and try to work things out. Before I go in for another licking. Somewhere. I don't know where. I have nowhere to go from here."

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"You're tired," he said. "Overwork, a bit underweight. Nervous. Anybody could diagnose that by watching you for five minutes. I'd send you a tonic if I thought you needed one. Your subject is going to be: *What Company Law Really Means.*"

"Listen, Tom, I tell you I'm—" I choked on the word 'broke', but still tried to make him understand, "— I'm finished, smashed, failed, there isn't any more. My luck's out. I'm not going to make a fool of myself talking to your club about success."

But it was useless to try to tell him the truth.

"We all have our bad times, Charlie. I've felt the same way, and I suppose lawyers do too," he said. "All right, tell us about your bad times—tell us about the one that's upset you like this. It'll do you good to tell your friends, Charlie. You city businessmen get too neurotic anyway. Well, I've got to go. Sick people, babies coming. Be seeing you."

But at the door he turned and put his big hand on my arm.

"Forget it, Charlie," he said. "I'm going to get the chemist to send you out a mild sedative. You'll feel better with some rest. And at the lunch, when the time comes just get on your feet and talk to people who—well, who thought a lot of you when you were a boy. Still do, and are very proud of you, Charlie. You can't disappoint us."

That luncheon was all I was afraid it would be, and worse. It was at the hotel, one long table in the middle of the dining room, but before we all sat down everybody gathered round me in an excited welcome and the crowd kept growing as more and more men came in. I hope my face wasn't as ghastly as it felt. I felt like an impostor—I was an impostor—and I knew I'd have to get out of this town and starve somewhere else, after this. The worst, I think, was when MacLaren, the town's best lawyer and my father's friend, came quietly into the crowd and shook my hand. Respectfully.

After that awful moment, the speech later on was a minor sin. I got to my feet and with Tom's kind good eyes looking up at me I talked. I just told them about a few cases in company law in London courts, one or two that I had been in on while I was with *Utilities*, and I tried to make it as interesting as I could. At least a third of the club members sitting there listening to me were men I remembered as boys. And now they were successful businessmen here at home.

And I . . . well, with sickness in my throat I told them a little about corporation law. But I didn't tell them about good connections that in the city somehow withered away and weren't there any more when you opened your own little office, counting on them.

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I didn't tell these friends about sitting at my nearly empty desk and listening to Paul Elton, my partner, walking nervously round in his equally unbusy room or practising golf strokes with a putter on the expensive carpeting we had bought. In fact I didn't mention my partner, because I would have had to say that last year when a chance came he had given up and gone into a big international law firm, and I didn't blame him. I wished I had found some chance like that, but his family is prominent. I didn't tell them about the long road down, of heart-breaking idleness, of good mental tools hardly anyone asked you to use; I didn't say anything about trying to keep up the appearances of the office but concealing my own address because finally it wasn't even a small bachelor flat any more. Or about worrying over office rent and the secretary's salary until finally I had to let her go, close up, and run for home after my slow licking. So here I was at home, and when I finished talking they all stood up applauding me.

Afterwards I tried to sneak away, but found myself walking down the street with MacLaren.

"Good talk, Charles," he said. "You have presence. And you know law." He sighed. "As a young man, I hankered for the big fields. But I couldn't do it. Widowed mother. Well, I'm glad one of our group has made it."

"I haven't. I had no right to make that talk." Miserably, cold with shame and agony of mind, I just simply had to tell this man, whom I respected so. "MacLaren, I'm a failure at the law."

He smiled gently. "All good lawyers know they are often failures, son, in wisdom and in justice," he said. "And home is the place to come for a little rest when you feel like that. I liked your talk, but I like you saying that better. The finer the mind, the more often is the head bowed. We are all proud of you, Charles, but I personally am prouder now of your humbleness. It is good to know you have kept it, in the city. In success."

Blindly I stumbled. I couldn't say any more. They *all* believed in me.

And then I saw Mary Calvert.

She was coming towards us along the pavement, carrying a bunch of letters to the post office, and we met almost face to face.

She stopped very still, looking up at me.

MacLaren said, "Ah—Miss Calvert," and smiling slightly again, he lifted his hat and walked on.

"Hello, Charlie," she said.

We both hesitated, the letters made a small crinkly sound in her hand. She was not quite so thin now, her hair was cut much

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shorter, and she was beautifully dressed in a pale gaberdine suit and dark blouse.

"Well!" I said in a voice so hearty that it sounded even falser than it was. "Well, this *is* a surprise!" I said, and it sounded louder.

We stood there in awkwardness. She started to take an uncertain step as if to pass me by, but swallowed instead and said off-handedly, "How's the big city?"

"Wonderful," I said. "Just wonderful." It was the first actual lie I had told since I had been here. With a sort of dim horror, and helplessly, I realized that I still wanted to impress this girl. And now I had nothing whatever to impress her with. Hurriedly, I asked, "What are you doing these days, Mary?"

"I'm Mr. Brannan's secretary, and general handywoman at the bank. He's manager now," she said. "I'm known as Miss-Calvert-over-at-the-bank. There's always one, in a little town."

"You sound very efficient," I said, lamely enough.

"I suppose I am," she said without any particular tone. "I've been there for a long time."

This time she did start to pass me, with a brief nod and the faintest of half-smiles. But I turned and fell into step with her, and we were walking up the street together. I didn't know why then, but I think I do now. The memory of that blatting boast, which only she had heard, was eating into me badly; and subconsciously I wanted, by being extremely nice to her, by being very urbane and big-city, to take the rough edges off that remembrance. But walking along, neither of us could think of anything to talk about.

At the post office door I stopped abruptly and said, "Mary, I'd like to see you again. While I'm here."

With one hand on the door she slowly turned her head to look at me again. In her eyes I could see the thought: He's just back here for a holiday, and all the girls he used to go out with are married . . .

But finally she said, "All right, Charlie."

I knew she was thinking that after I went back to Town our people, who take any hint of romance seriously, might feel sorry for her.

"I'll tell you what," she said. "After banking hours I'm going out to look at a farm. Mr. Brannan sometimes sends me when it isn't too big a loan. You be at *The Elm and Cricketers* at four o'clock and I'll collect you in the car."

She went on into the post office, and I walked home to wander round the empty rooms for a couple of hours. There is no feeling

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quite like the panicky awareness that all the world is at work, not needing your help.

When she picked me up at four o'clock she had on a little tight hat which fitted down over her hair, somehow making her profile very fine and remote and pure, but after a while as she drove in silence an unsuspected laughter-line deepened in her cheek. " I'm glad you like it," she said demurely. " I just bought it a few minutes ago. For my first date in—er, some time."

" I should think you'd have lots," I said with uneasy gallantry.

" I scare them off, I suppose," she said. " And anyway, I can't afford to be serious, and for me it would have to be serious to have many dates with a man. You're different," she added hastily. " You're just a visitor now. You don't belong here any more and before long you'll go away again . . . You've done what you said you would, Charlie. That night. I've—I've often thought about it."

So she did remember it. But not the way I did.

" The silly little things that stick in people's minds ! " I said. " I remember a lot of childhood things about you too, Mary. It's funny, because we didn't see much of each other when we were children."

" Yes, it is odd," she said, in a small voice.

At least after that we started talking a bit more easily, though we both shied away from personal subjects. The farm was fifteen miles out to the south east of the town and by the time we got there we were good friends, talking about her work and the town and people.

I waited in the car while she went into the farmhouse. In about five minutes an anxious looking farmer came out of the back door with her and began showing her round, pausing to explain earnestly at the barn and at the tractor shed. The inspection took some time ; they walked out into the fields, and I suspect she had a hard time trying not to remember how people felt when they needed a little money very badly.

She came back to the car and we drove home more silently than we had come out. In front of her house Mary said, " Come in and meet my mother."

The house had been all done up, painted white with green shutters, and the lawn was velvety. It was beautiful and modern inside, too, and her mother, tall and white haired, came down the stairs.

She was slightly startled to see me, but I think pleased in a questioning sort of way, and while the three of us sat talking she always called me Mr. Andrews. I didn't stay long. I could smell dinner cooking.

At the door I asked, " Tomorrow ? "

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"Yes," Mary said.

That next evening we didn't have to look at a farm but we drove out into the country again, and then on Sunday afternoon, and after that it was a habit. Sometimes I would have dinner with them and Mary and I would do the washing up before we went out driving through the long September dusks, or sat in wicker garden chairs watching the stars come out above her little garden.

Mrs. Meigs became breathless with silent speculation whenever I saw her and the town elaborately pretended not to be noticing, but I suppose by that time we didn't care.

I know I didn't care any more what anybody thought or believed. Except Mary. Some day I would have to tell her. But . . . but I put it off. When I was with her I believed in myself again. I suppose it was as simple and as selfish as that. I'm not offering any excuses.

After four or five weeks, though, people I met on the street began looking at me with a more puzzled expression, as if wondering when I was going back to my City office; and one evening Mary asked me straight out.

We were coming home from a long Sunday drive, and had stopped the car on the crest of the range of hills. Below us and far away the town was tiny and distant in the long light of the setting sun. The time had come, the time I had evaded. It had been easy to evade. Mary had asked me nothing until now—that's her way—and a few stories about my early professional experiences had been enough. I took a deep breath.

"Mary," I said, "I'm not going back at all. I haven't got a City office. I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm finished."

"What do you mean, Charlie?" she said quietly.

"I haven't had any right to go on seeing you, my dear. But I've—I've needed to," I said. "Mary, I've failed in my practice. I came home without any hope left. I came here because it was the only place I had left, and I don't have to pay rent. I have forty eight pounds, and nothing in sight."

She touched my hand and said, "Do you want to tell me?"

"Desperately," I said, and while she sat gazing at the lights twinkling in the Vale and the black looking hills beyond, I gave her the story, sparing myself nothing. Once she closed her eyes for a moment and bit her lip.

When I had finished, she started the car and turned it round in the road. For a long time we drove in silence, away from the town again, out over the hills, towards the evening star.

"Listen," she said at last. "You're going to open a law office here. In Pimpernel."

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" On forty eight pounds ? " I said. " It's a long road up."

" I know that. I know all about the long road up. And I know all about failure, and what it does to people. My father died of it ten years ago, and you're not going to." Her voice became practical. " Now you listen to me for a while and don't say a word until I've finished. I have some money saved, enough for this, and moreover I'm going to resign from my job in the bank and be your secretary. I've got plenty to keep us for a year, and that will be enough."

" I won't do it," I said.

" I'm resigning tomorrow morning," she said crisply. " You're going to have to do it, to take care of me. And mother. I mean I'm going to keep the books and draw a salary. You're going to have to work . . . It won't take you too long to pay me back, and nobody will ever know."

We argued until nearly midnight, driving aimlessly round the country roads, and once she was crying with rage and beating my arm with her fist.

Wearily I said, " Why are you doing this ? "

" Because I want to. Because—don't let's talk about it now. Just say it's because I believe in you, and I'm going to see to it that you always believe in yourself again."

It took a lot of doing, but the autumn day came when I sat in a newly painted office overlooking the market square. My law books were out of storage, we had spent two evenings unpacking them and arranging them on the shelves, and we had stayed until late the night before, putting the final touches to everything. There had been a long story in the paper about the brilliant City attorney, etc., very flowery and extolling, and down towards the bottom of the column it said that Miss Mary Calvert, well known and popular from her career in the bank, had accepted the position of secretary in my office. But everybody knew all that anyway, and for days half the town had been in and out giving us advice and help while the furniture was coming in. MacLaren was going to introduce me to the local law society this afternoon.

Just now, as I looked slowly up from my desk, Mary was standing there in the early sunshine, smiling at me before she took off her hat, and her lips were trembling a little. I thought: The frosty winters will come, and the blowy springtimes, and I will be here with my wife in our house, in my land and my town, a little Northern town that wouldn't let me be a failure. And may the honour and humanity of all good country lawyers be always here in this office, as I feel it now, Amen, I thought.

There was a step in the corridor outside, and the shadow of

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our first client fell uncertainly across the frosted glass door with my name on it.

Mary slipped swiftly into her chair behind the desk in the reception room; and as the door knob slowly turned, she nodded vigorously and mysteriously at me.

* * *

CONSEQUENCES

It's an old party game we invite you to play with us, and given the facts of the case, can you recognize the figures? Count one point for the characters in each story or poem, one for the author and one for the source, making a total of twenty seven points in all. The answers are on page 109.

1. *There is honour even among thieves, according to the proverb, but two of this villainous trio conspired to kill the third, who in his turn contrived to poison his murderers, posthumously—and all for a heap of shining florins.*
2. *With the aid of the gaoler's daughter he escaped from his prison in the guise of a washerwoman, with his reputation for being "a desperate and dangerous fellow, untarnished." But though he boarded a train for home, he had to make a jump for it.*
3. *He held the human race in scorn, and though his name was included in the volume called "People Qualified to Be Attendant on His Majesty," you'll find him, according to the poet, blacking boots at the Savoy.*
4. *A thousand guilders would seem a small price to pay for rat-riddance on such a scale—but the City fathers repaid their benefactor with shame and suffered his terrible revenge.*
5. *In the wickedness of his heart he destroyed the good abbot's warning bell—and was himself justly wrecked upon that self same rock.*
6. *"What mighty contests rise from trivial things!" Just a curl, scissor-snipped from her lovely head by a bold lord—and lo, an epic!*
7. *He boasted of his lady's virtue, but was otherwise persuaded by a treacherous friend—and so he planned to kill her, though she was the daughter of a British king, but was prevented by a dramatic coincidence.*
8. *"When love rejected turns to hate,*
   All ill betide the man . . .
   A scream—a sob—'He called me—names!'
   And then the fray began"—and not even the maid Ultruda's crucifix could save the blue eyed Dane from that fatal knife thrust.
9. *"Is there any peace," these sailors asked, "in ever climbing up the climbing wave?" And preferring the island life of idleness, they ate the food of forgetfulness.*

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★*Popular fiction and the Western screen world have conjured in the imagination a picture of the Canadian Mounted Police as a force of dashing horsemen in red coats and Stetson hats. But in real life this colourful uniform is kept strictly for rare ceremonial occasions, and the routine work of the North-west mounties is done by canoe or on foot in summer, and in winter by dog-team sledge.*

In fact it is the husky dog and not the horse that figures so largely in the heroic exploits of this great force. Fitted by nature to live under conditions of severest hardship, this splendid creature, who is pure timber-wolf domesticated over the years by the Eskimo and Indian, is not easily matched for courage and endurance. And Major Bruce, in this story from the life of Dr. H. G. Esmonde, claims that Canada owes more to the husky dog than to any single man in her history.

NATUK

by GEORGE BRUCE

I WAS stationed, at one period of my service with the Mounted Police, in the far north of Canada, on the Porcupine River, some fifty miles north of Rat Lake. Though well on the cool side of the Arctic Circle, we were just then having our short hot summer. The day temperature often rose to 80 degrees, and in the evenings there seemed to be more mosquitoes than fresh air. My cabin stood by a small lake from which a stream ran down to the river, among low hills covered with spruce forest.

I spent many hours roaming through that forest, or sitting still, watching the wild life that filled it. Among bracken and brambles, fallen trees and branches, it was easy to find a hiding place from which one could see all round.

There was plenty to see, if a man stayed quiet and kept his eyes open: birds of many sorts, foxes, martens, squirrels, mink, the friendly little chipmunks, perhaps a deer, perhaps a she-wolf with a small cub, a lumbering bear in search of food, or a porcupine stripping the rough outer bark from a sapling spruce, to feed on the succulent inner skin.

One day I had been for a long walk through the woods and was on my way back when I came upon a wolverine trap. It had been

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sprung, and in it, lying dead, was a beautiful husky bitch. She must have run away from some Indian camp, the call of her wolf ancestors in her blood, and taken to the woods.

The trap had been set for wolves or wolverines, pestilent brutes both, and it was clearly right that I should set it again. I forced down the spring till I could open the powerful spiked jaws, and was pulling out the dead husky when I heard a whimper. Out from under the body crawled a little pup, only a few weeks old. I tucked him into the breast of my coat and reset the trap, after which I skinned the husky, thinking that her pelt would make a good rug for my cabin, and then started for home.

My dogs were tied up, but when I put the pup down and began to open the cabin door they scented him, and a savage growl arose, that told of their smelling possible food. The pup sensed danger and huddled close to my feet as I entered the cabin.

I fed him on condensed milk till he was old enough to eat solid food, and at night he would curl up in my bunk with me. Before long he would follow me everywhere unless I had to go out for the day ,when he would settle down on the rug beside my bed, the rug I had made out of his mother's skin. Evidently he found some friendly influence in it ; for while I was away he would lie there quite happily and never move.

After the first week I introduced him formally to the sledge dogs. They sniffed him over, each in turn, and then accepted him as a regular member of the household. Soon he would take all manner of liberties with them, usually borne with amused tolerance, but if he went too far—if, for example, he tugged too vigorously with his sharp little teeth at a big dog's ear—a growl and a warning snap of teeth would follow. The pup would flee in any direction and lie low till the atmosphere cleared.

My team leader especially became very attached to the youngster. When I took the sledge out I would put the pup on top of the load, and the team leader soon recognized this as part of the regular routine. Before starting he would look round to see that the pup was on the load. If he was not, no shouts or whip-cracks would induce the leader to start till the pup was duly installed.

From the first I decided that he was not to be a sledge dog, but my personal companion ; and a splendid companion he proved. He came with me on all my rambles through the woods, and if I was looking for meat he would put up rabbits for me to shoot. I soon trained him not to chase them, and as his intelligence developed I taught him many things. I would leave some article on the doorstep and send him back to fetch it, till he would do so from a long distance. Later I would give him something, a glove or mitten, sending him home to leave it on the mat and return.

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Perhaps because he was never treated as harshly as one has to treat sledge dogs, he showed a sensitive nature such as I have known in no other husky. I never once had to beat him; a tap of my fingers on his nose was the utmost correction he needed, and he would look up with a pathetic expression as much as to say, "What have I done wrong?" As a watch dog he was unsurpassed. No stranger could approach the cabin unless I introduced him, when the dog would sniff him all over with a low throaty growl, and would never fail to know him if he came again.

By the time he had grown to his full size, a magnificent dog, we were inseparable companions. He would hardly let me out of his sight; wherever I went he followed close at my heels. I called him "Natuk", which in the West Eskimo language means "shadow". We lived alone, far from any human society, and our comradeship grew closer and closer as time went on, until I used to feel that he knew exactly what I was thinking about.

A handsome animal was Natuk, about thirty inches at the shoulder and weighing close on nine stone. His colour was that of a sable collie, but a few shades lighter, with dark tips to the long hair, especially on his flanks, while his broad chest was almost white. Probably his sire was a timber-wolf, for he had the true wolf head with sharp prick-ears, though a white blaze on his face suggested a strain of Newfoundland in his dam, which may have accounted for his weight and strength. His bushy tail was carried in proper husky style, close-curled over his back.

My position in the Mounted Police was officially that of doctor, but in that sparsely populated region the calls for medical or surgical help were few, and unofficially I did a good deal of regular police work, especially in the matter of keeping an eye on any strangers who might drift into the country, and finding out all about them. Some fifty miles away lived a friend of mine, a Dogrib Indian, whom I found very useful in getting me information of this kind, information which I passed on to the proper quarter.

Early in October a rumour reached me of two newcomers to the district who did not sound desirable visitors. I decided to look up my Indian friend and see what he could tell me about them. The first snow had already fallen, and as usual, before the weather grows really cold, it was soft and yielding.

Snow of that kind makes bad travelling for a dog sledge, and fifty miles being a short journey as we reckon things in the North, I planned to do it on foot, pulling a light toboggan with the few things I needed—rifle, blankets, food, and a small tent. Natuk, of course, would come with me, and my Indian chore-boy would look after the sledge dogs till my return.

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About twenty five miles out, half way to my destination, was the cabin of my nearest neighbour, a Swedish trapper and a good friend of mine. Ole Oleson was a man with more education than the average trapper, and a better philosophy of life.

In the spring, when he took his winter's harvest of furs to the trading-post, instead of spending the proceeds in a riotous orgy, he would bank most of the money and come back to the North to earn more. He was now a well-to-do man. His cabin was comfortable beyond the ordinary standard; he was intelligent and a good talker, and I always enjoyed an evening with him.

Starting early, Natuk and I reached Ole's cabin late in the afternoon. We had a hearty welcome from the trapper, and spent a pleasant evening. Next morning after breakfast I began to pack my gear on the toboggan, when Ole begged me not to go.

"There's a blizzard coming," he said. "Stop here today, and you can go when it has blown over."

Ole was an experienced backwoodsman, but so was I, having been born and brought up in that country. I looked at the sky.

"You're wrong, Ole," I said.

"I'm not," said he. "I know it's coming. I can smell it."

I did not believe him, and I said so. I was anxious to push on, as I felt it was important to see the Indian and get him on to those two strangers before they could start any funny business. But Ole insisted, and the end of it was that we lit our pipes and sat talking and smoking till well after mid-day. Then I decided that I could delay no longer, so I finished packing the toboggan and said—"Well, Ole, if I *do* get into a jam, I'll send Natuk back to you and he'll guide you to wherever I happen to be."

Natuk and I set out, taking a trail that led through the upper hills where the spruce forest was thin and open. The sun went down about three o'clock, and with its setting a wind sprang up, growing rapidly stronger. I began to think that Ole might be right about the blizzard, and turned downhill towards the thick spruce in the valley, which would give some shelter.

I was going as fast as I could when suddenly the ground gave way under my feet, and dropped into space. Throwing out my hands instinctively to save myself, I let go the rope, and the toboggan skidded away among the trees.

In a moment I realized what had happened. I had fallen into an Indian bear-trap, scores of which were to be found in these hills. A wide pit is dug, about eight feet deep, one or more pointed stakes fixed in the bottom, the top crossed by stretchers of young saplings, over which is laid a cover of brushwood. The snow had hidden the trap effectively, and I had walked straight into it.

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Not having the weight or bulk of a bear, I had not gone to the bottom. I was caught round the waist by a mass of jagged sticks, the upper part of my body free, but on kicking about to try for some foothold I found that the pit was full of brambles and dead twigs that had fallen through the cover. This meant that the trap was an old one, perhaps several years old.

That set me thinking. Probably the stretchers covering the trap were pretty rotten. If I struggled too violently, the whole thing might collapse and land me at the bottom of the pit, where the pointed hardwood stakes might still be sound enough and sharp enough to impale me. Even if they were not, it would be impossible to climb out, and I should starve to death miserably in that tangle of dead sticks and brambles.

Cautiously I tried to work my way out of the mass of spiky branches that gripped me, but in vain. I had no foot-hold to give me a leg up, and my efforts only resulted in my sinking a few inches lower. The wind was blowing a gale now, and I could hear dead trees falling far and near.

Suddenly a sharp crack sounded close by. A dead spruce, split by the frost of some previous winter, broke off, the whole top of one half falling across the bear-trap and pinning me down. I was not much hurt, but only my right arm remained free; my left arm and my body were held as in a vice among the network of broken boughs and débris.

All this time Natuk had been jumping round me, scratching in the snow, trying to dig me out, and pulling at sticks with his teeth. Several times he broke through the top crust, but having four legs he was able to scramble out. Now that I was helplessly pinioned, it flashed into my mind that he might really be able to assist me. I had said jokingly to Ole that if I got into a jam I would send Natuk to fetch him. That joke could be turned into reality if Natuk was as clever as I believed him to be.

When I came in from a journey I would often get him to pull off my big moose-hide mittens, and now I called him, holding out my free right hand till he caught the end of the mitten in his teeth. As he pulled it off I said, "Take it back and get help, Natuk!" waving my hand in the direction of Ole's cabin. Natuk looked at me as if trying to grasp what I was saying; then, as I repeated the order and pointed to the way, he seemed to catch the idea. With one snap he gripped the mitten firmly in his mouth and set off at a loping wolf-canter on the line that I had given him.

There I was, left all alone, with plenty of time to think things over. I began to calculate when I might expect help to come. We had covered about ten miles when I turned off the trail.

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With the wild animal's instinct for short-cuts, Natuk should bring that down to seven miles at the most, and could do that in an hour. It should not take Ole more than an hour and a half to harness up his dog-team and come out. So in two hours and a half, three hours at the most, I might expect to be released.

The wind dropped as quickly as it had risen, and in an hour's time the air was again perfectly still. Not a sound of any kind in the woods, only the dead silence of an Arctic winter's night. Though there was no moon it was by no means dark, as the brilliance of the stars in that clear air, refracted from the snow, gives light enough to see things fairly well at a short distance.

In my constrained position, half lying with my feet unsupported, I grew very stiff and cold, especially my right arm. When the tree fell I had thrown it up to guard my head, with the result that a forked branch had trapped it so that I could not bring my hand lower than my shoulder.

Now that the heavy moose-hide mitten was gone, I had no protection for that hand but the woollen inner mitten. It was lucky for me that the wind had dropped, or I should have been frost-bitten. Round me was a cage of bare branches; in front of me the long split trunk of the spruce.

Slowly the time crawled on, while I tried to picture my dog racing through the woods to the trapper's cabin; the hurried harnessing of the dog-team and the Swede dashing along the trail; Natuk, ahead of the team, going all out to bring help to his master and friend.

Then through the profound silence of the winter woods rang a blood-freezing cry, the howl of a lone wolf.

There is a difference between the howl of a wolf that leads a pack, on first scenting his quarry, and that of a solitary beast, the ex-leader of a pack, driven from his position by a younger and stronger rival. The difference is not to be described in words, but the lone wolf's howl has an indefinable quality which a trained ear cannot mistake, an aggressive and defiant note, as if voicing the bitterness that rankles in the heart of the deposed leader. That sense of defeat, joined to the craft and cunning which years of leadership have given him, makes the lone wolf the most dangerous beast in all the North.

I could hear that cry now, its low cadence gradually working up to the full-throated howl, then dying away. A long pause, ten minutes at least, and it came again, this time nearer and louder. Once more it sounded, nearer still, and then the deep silence of the night. I listened with every nerve strung. Was it my scent that the hunter had winded, or that of some night-roaming animal?

Near the butt of the fallen spruce I suddenly saw two points

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of green light. They moved forward, and behind them I could just make out a ghostly form creeping along the tree-trunk. I shouted, and the brute backed; but soon he crept forward again.

Again I shouted, and again, and each time he drew back. Once or twice he disappeared for a short time, but returned. I kept on shouting till my voice dropped to a hoarse croak. The wolf grew bolder, and came on slowly till he was about ten feet away.

In spite of the peril of my position I could not help feeling the grim humour of it. Here was I, a grown man in full health and strength, at the mercy of a beast not half my size. Born and reared in these northern forests, trained from childhood in all the wood-craft and hunting lore of the Indians, I felt that the rawest tenderfoot could not have got himself into a worse mess.

My revolver, a Colt's .45, capable of killing six wolves in ten seconds, hung from my belt fully loaded. But I could not get either hand down to draw it, and the wolf was master of the situation. The thing was just absurd.

Absurd or not, however, I must do what I could while any hope remained. Indian hunters had often told me that a wolf will never attack so long as a man keeps up some rhythmic motion. I began to wave my right hand in a measured swing from side to side, and I could see the wolf's head and eyes following the movement. He stood there half crouched, a lean, hungry-looking brute, saliva dripping from his jaws, and those baleful green eyes glowing dimly in the starlight; but he came no nearer.

I was numb with cold, and my arm grew so weary with the steady movement that I began to wonder how long I could keep it up. The chill of utter exhaustion was creeping over me. Soon I should be unable to swing my hand any more, and then . . .

Three shots rang out—distant, but clear in the still night air. Ole was firing to signal his coming. A rush of hope surged through me, lending a momentary spasm of energy to my weary arm. But the sound of those shots seemed to rouse the wolf from his inaction, as if he felt that his time was short and that he must get to work. With fangs bared he began to creep nearer. My strength was almost gone; another moment and those fangs would be at my throat.

A heavy body hurtled through the air. Natuk, his teeth buried in the wolf's shoulder, flung him off the tree, and the two were locked in a fierce grapple in the hollow of the bear-trap. The snow flew in showers as the fight maddened to fury.

Both fought silently after the manner of wolves, not a sound but the snap and slash of teeth and the dull rip of skin and flesh. If ever I prayed in my life, I prayed then that my dog might win.

The duel went on, fierce and deadly, both combatants fighting to kill. If Natuk was a shade the heavier, the wolf was an experienced

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brute that had fought his way to the head of the pack and kept his position for years by dint of ferocity and fangs. For a time I could not tell which was getting the better of it.

At length the wolf bounded out of the hollow on to the level ground. Natuk leaped after him, and the death-worry began again. I saw Natuk grip the wolf by the side of the neck and throw him clean over his back. Then I must have fainted, for I knew no more till I heard the crack of a pistol—Ole finishing off the wolf.

It seemed ages before Ole dragged me clear of the bear-trap. I was too spent to give him any help, and it needed all his great strength to pull me out. My first thought was to look at Natuk.

He lay on the blood-soaked snow, hideously mauled, a mass of wounds. Both shoulders were torn to the bone, one ear was slashed off, his flank ripped open to the ribs, and the entrails sagging out. But his eyes spoke to me dumbly, and he tried to lick my hand.

We of the North have not much use for sentiment. Life is too hard and death too near at all times to encourage any soft-hearted emotions, and my up-bringing among the Indians had case-hardened my feelings since childhood.

But the sight of my friend and comrade lying there in such agony brought me nearer to a breakdown than ever before or since. Yet the wolf was in a worse state, and it can hardly have needed Ole's bullet to give him the *coup de grâce.*

Natuk was dying, but he had won the battle.

I knew too much of wounds to have any hope. The only kindness I could show Natuk was to put him out of his pain. I drew my revolver, but the look in the dog's eyes was too much for me. "Ole," I said, "I'll leave it to you to do him the good turn."

Sick at heart, I crept away among the bushes, pulling my coat over my head, till through the heavy fur I heard a muffled report and knew that all was over. We put Natuk on the sledge, and next day I buried him in a clearing near the trapper's cabin, where the sun would shine upon his grave. At its head I placed a heavy wooden slab, and on it cut three words deeply with my knife—

NATUK MY SHADOW

* * *

VERY CIVIL

For ten minutes the actor tried to compete with the bawling of a child in the gallery. At last he went to the footlights and announced: "Unless the play is stopped, ladies and gentlemen, this child can't possibly continue."

Stage Weekly

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THE NEW MEMBER

The man was obviously as mad as a hatter!

by ROBERT LEWIS

MR. PREBLE closed the glass panelled door behind him in his usual careful way and took six slow, precise steps on to the verandah overlooking the green lawn that sloped down to the tennis court.

Mr. Preble was a small, bony man in his early fifties, with a high forehead wrinkled into a perpetually worried look; his black moustache, which curved downwards over the corners of his mouth, had a gloss and a vigour all its own and seemed incongruous against his cavernous cheeks and sallow skin. Although Mr. Preble was well endowed with worldly goods and dressed well, even fussily, the tautness of his skin over his high cheekbones often led strangers to suppose he had been hungry for a long time.

It would have been more accurate to suppose that he had *not* been hungry for a long time. Mr. Preble was a man of little energy, which he used sparingly, doing everything with great deliberation. It was his small appetite and meticulous ideas on diet that gave his face the lean, almost transparent appearance so deceptive to strangers. But then, Mr. Preble kept pretty much to himself, hating crowds and the speed and jostle of modern life, and especially those robust creatures who apparently took pride in their vigorous handshake and who, when he was introduced to them, insisted on crushing his brittle hand in their big paws.

Mr. Preble, standing at the edge of the verandah, looked about him in appreciation. It was a beautiful day, one of those sunny days when bits of fleecy cloud serve only to emphasize the blueness of the sky. A faint breeze, laden with the freshness of miles of country green it had traversed on its way to Mr. Preble's nostrils, made him think: This is the life. I suppose I really ought to get out more. I'm glad my brother persuaded me to come with him.

Mr. Preble decided that this was the finest country club he had ever seen. It had everything: a beautiful clubhouse, gardens, swimming pool, tennis courts, golf course, everything. Mr. Preble's inclinations were far from athletic, but he enjoyed watching sports from a safe distance, wishing meanwhile he were not so fragile. And then, the lawns and shubbery here were so carefully kept. Mr. Preble loved neatness.

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His musings on the verandah were interrupted by a discreet cough to his right; he looked up to see an elderly gentleman regarding him from the vantage of an easy chair beside a wicker table. He was an imposing man, large and portly, with a cheerful, florid face and fair hair combed straight back. He was dressed comfortably in grey flannels, obviously expensive, but his sandals and open-necked silk shirt gave him a look of informality. Mr. Preble was taken by an instinctive mistrust. The man looked like a hearty type—far too convivial and violent a character for a man in Mr. Preble's condition.

"Good afternoon, sir," the portly gentleman said to Mr. Preble. "Won't you sit down and have a drink with me?"

"Thank you," Mr. Preble replied, with hesitation. There was no help for it, he supposed. One couldn't be rude. He introduced himself, careful not to approach within handshaking distance, and was informed in return that the gentleman's name was Mr. Meecham.

Mr. Meecham added, "Of course, that's not what people call me when they know me better. I have the good fortune to be financially independent—quite wealthy, in fact—and the members of this club have taken to calling me Mr. Moneybags."

A brief smile appeared at the corners of Mr. Preble's sad mouth, and disappeared just as quickly. He lowered himself carefully into a cushioned wicker chair across the table from Mr. Meecham. "That must be rather annoying," he said.

"Not at all," said Mr. Meecham, with an airy flourish of his hand, which revealed a large diamond ring and carefully manicured nails. "I must say I'd rather be called Mr. Moneybags than some of the nicknames some of the other members have. Do you see that fellow on the tennis court? The big one?"

Following Mr. Meecham's pink finger, Mr. Preble saw a handsome fellow with a bronzed torso, who was driving the ball with furious energy across the net to his opponent, a spindly-legged, white haired man who was obviously no match for him. "Handsome chap, isn't he?" said Mr. Meecham. "They call him Casanova. How do you like that?"

Mr. Preble was not sure that "Mr. Moneybags" was in better taste than "Casanova," but he was too polite to say so. Besides, this preoccupation with nicknames seemed somewhat childish to him. He stroked his cheek gently with his fingers, one of his habits, wishing meanwhile that Mr. Meecham's voice were not so booming. It seemed to enter into his very vitals and vibrate most disturbingly.

"Are you staying long?" Mr. Meecham asked.

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" Oh, no, I've just come down for the afternoon with my brother. That's his car over there." He inclined his head in his slow way towards the drive on the left of the verandah, where his brother's big car stood in the shade of a fine old elm tree.

" Your brother ? " asked Mr. Meecham. " Is he a member ? "

Mr. Preble winced. Really, Mr. Meecham's voice—" No, I don't believe he's a member."

Mr. Meecham seemed suspicious. " Then whose bags are those on the back seat ? "

" Well, you see," said Mr. Preble, wishing the portly gentleman were not so inquisitive, " they're really mine, but I've lent them to my brother, who is making a trip. But first he had to come out here on business, to see the club manager, Mr. Tolliver, and he asked me to come too, to keep him company."

Mr. Meecham's florid face cleared. He cried heartily, " And I'm glad you did ! "

Gracious ! thought Mr. Preble. One more bellow like that, and I'll fall apart. I do wish—Mr. Meecham, beaming, raised his arm and waved it violently at a white jacketed attendant who was walking across the lawn towards the tennis court.

When the man came over, Mr. Preble was startled to hear him say, " Yes, Mr. Moneybags, what'll it be ? "

Mr. Meecham winked at Mr. Preble and said in a stage whisper, " What did I tell you ? " Then he said aloud, " What will you have to drink ? "

" No, really," said Mr. Preble in alarm. " I couldn't possibly. I'm not the least bit—"

" Nonsense! " said Mr. Meecham. He ordered two Scotch and sodas, specifying with great emphasis that he wanted two lumps of ice for each. Mr. Preble thought the waiter insolent, for when Mr. Meecham had finished ordering, the fellow shrugged and walked away.

Mr. Meecham said, " You've got to be careful with those fellows. They behave as if they own the place. I've been forced to complain to Mr. Banks several times. By the way, you're not a teetotaller, are you ? I could change yours to a lemonade, if you prefer."

" It doesn't matter," said Mr. Preble. " I'm afraid I couldn't have either. No offence, of course. I have to be extremely careful about what I eat and drink. The slightest thing shows up on me, you see. You must have noticed, of course. I'm afraid it's rather embarrassing at times."

" Embarrassing ? " repeated Mr. Meecham, puzzled. " Don't know what you're talking about. You look all right to me."

Mr. Preble, stroking his cheek, thought bitterly : I wish people

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wouldn't be so kind. Meecham seems a shrewd sort of man. Sees right through me, of course.

Mr. Meecham leaned over and said in a low voice, " This Mr. Tolliver. Is he a friend of yours ? Or your brother's ? "

" I've only just met him," said Mr. Preble. " I don't think my brother met him before today either. It's a bit odd, in a way, because I thought that— Some business connection, no doubt. Anyway, my brother is in Mr. Tolliver's office now, having a talk with him."

" Well, then," said Mr. Meecham with decision, " I don't mind telling you that I don't like him at all. The man's nothing but a busybody."

It appeared from Mr. Meecham's discourse that nobody in the club liked Mr. Tolliver, whose dark, horn rimmed glasses and Van Dyke beard gave him a foreign look. Mr. Tolliver had the bad habit of wandering quietly about the club rooms in his rubber soled shoes and eavesdropping on conversations. As if that were not enough in the line of nosiness, he took advantage of his position as manager to invite members to his office occasionally, where he interrogated them at great length, under the guise of friendly interest. Mr. Meecham had been forced to speak to Mr. Banks about Mr. Tolliver.

" Who's Mr. Banks ? " Mr. Preble asked.

" Aha ! " said Mr. Meecham slyly. " That's what everybody would like to know." Lowering his voice, he said, " Mr. Banks is in charge of everything around here. He handles my investments for me. If anything goes wrong, *he's* the lad to see. Although, of course, you can't actually *see* him. You have to call him up."

This is very odd, thought Mr. Preble. He said, " This Mr. Banks sounds very mysterious."

" Mysterious ! " cried Mr. Meecham, slapping his stout thigh. " Well, I should say ! You couldn't have chosen a better word for him. I don't suppose you know, Mr. Preble, but I'm the only one who can reach him ? I've got a private telephone line."

" Really ? " said Mr. Preble rather doubtfully.

" Just watch," said Mr. Meecham. Bending over, he picked up a telephone that had been hidden on the floor by his chair, placed it on his lap, and lifted the receiver. After a moment, he said in a low voice, " Mr. Banks, please."

As he waited, he winked at Mr. Preble in a slow, friendly fashion, as if to say, " *Now* we'll see ! " Then his face lighted up, and he cried, " Mr. Banks ? That you, Mr. Banks ? Do you know who this is ? Mr. Moneybags. How are you ? "

Very odd, indeed, thought Mr. Preble with the beginnings of apprehension. Mr. Moneybags—that is, Mr. Meecham—had not

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dialled any number, but had simply lifted the receiver and asked for Mr. Banks. Quite evidently a private line. But where was Mr. Banks ? Was he at the club ? Probably, because Mr. Meecham had said that Mr. Banks was in charge of everything around here. What, then, was Mr. Tolliver ?

Frowning, Mr. Preble regarded the tennis players, wishing Jules would hurry up. Mr. Meecham was talking very rapidly over the telephone ; he seemed to be giving Mr. Banks a full report of his day's activities. Every now and then he enquired about his investments, and crowed with delight at the answer. " That's good," he said several times. " That's very good." He nodded significantly at Mr. Preble, who turned his head because he found Mr. Meecham's enthusiasm embarrassing.

As he did so, his glance followed the telephone cord, which ran from Mr. Meecham's lap across the floor to the edge of the verandah, disappearing into the grass of the lawn. But no, it didn't quite disappear ; the grass was short enough for Mr. Preble to see that the plug was stuck into the ground. Mr. Preble knew enough about electrical matters to realize that nobody would place an electrical outlet in such an exposed spot. The end of the telephone wire had simply been pushed into the ground.

A feeling of horror crept along Mr. Preble's veins. He turned his head slowly to look at Mr. Meecham. The telephone, the private line, the Mr. Banks that no one could see—the man was obviously as mad as a hatter. Bits of Mr. Meecham's conversation flashed across his mind. There was no doubt of it. As mad as could be. What kind of place *was* this ?

He felt that he was suffocating. His chin went back into his throat with a kind of involuntary rigidity ; only his eyes moved rapidly, taking in the white jacketed attendants who lounged about the grounds, athletic young men who seemed to have nothing to do but sun themselves on the lawn. He must attract their attention somehow. Perhaps Mr. Meecham would get violent or difficult at any moment.

Mr. Preble was not a brave man. His breath came with a sucking noise that seemed to disturb Mr. Meecham, who banged down the receiver, after saying abruptly, " I'll call you later, Mr. Banks."

Mr. Preble took a deep breath, ready to spring to his feet and make a dash for it. But Mr. Meecham was looking over Mr. Preble's head at someone standing behind him, and Mr. Preble, with a brief prayer of thanksgiving, recalled Mr. Tolliver and his rubber soled shoes.

With a look of disgust on his face, Mr. Meecham picked up his telephone, and walked down the grassy slope towards the tennis

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court. Halfway there he stopped, kneeled laboriously on the grass, and pushed the telephone plug firmly into the ground. A moment later, seated crosslegged on the grass, he was chatting gaily into the mouthpiece.

Behind Mr. Preble, a kindly voice, Mr. Tolliver's voice, said, " You mustn't pay any attention to Mr. Moneybags, Mr. Preble. He's quite harmless."

Letting out his breath with a gulping sound, Mr. Preble turned towards Mr. Tolliver and was about to answer when he saw his brother sitting in the car in the drive.

" Oh, excuse me," he said to Mr. Tolliver, " my brother's waiting for me." He started to get to his feet but, unexpectedly, a pair of strong arms seized him from behind and pulled him gently back into his chair.

Mr. Preble shouted out. His brother's head jerked round towards him.

From where Mr. Preble was sitting, he could see the tears in his brother's eyes. He called again louder, in wonder. As he watched, an attendant swung the bags, his bags, from the back of the car and set them down on the drive. Then his brother drove off towards the main road.

Dr. Tolliver sat down beside him, his eyes warm and friendly behind his dark glasses.

" Don't touch me," Mr. Preble said rapidly. " Don't you dare touch me."

" Tell me, Mr. Preble," Dr. Tolliver said softly, withdrawing the hand he had extended, " when did it first come to your attention that you were made of glass ? "

* * *

MISSING LINK

A postman who found it difficult to wake in the morning, spoke to his doctor about it. The doctor gave him a pill to try.

Following a very sound sleep, the postman woke in nice time to get to the post office. After dressing leisurely and enjoying a protracted breakfast, he strolled into the office just before signing-on time.

" I'm early this morning," he said to the inspector.

" You are," agreed the inspector, " but where were you yesterday ? "

Magazine Digest

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★*" Please to remember the Fifth of November, Gunpowder, Treason and Plot ", chant the sooty faced street urchins, as they drag their truck-cradled effigies along the City pavements and hold out their sawn off cocoa tins for the pennies of passers by. And yet, hazards Nigel Balchin, in his survey of the events that led up to that never-to-be-forgotten event in history, and his clinical study of the unhappy scapegoat, Mr. Fawkes, distressingly few of the small boys who celebrate this colourful drama seem to know who the " Old Guy " was, or what he did.*

Our Readers will not of course be in this lamentable state of ignorance, but we venture to believe that this " monumental villain ", whose effigy has been burnt every year for three and a half centuries, needs no apology for inclusion in our pages.

THE DASTARDLY BEHAVIOUR OF MR. FAWKES

by NIGEL BALCHIN

SIR EDWARD PHILLIPS, in stating the indictment against Fawkes and the other Gunpowder conspirators, described the matter to be examined as " of such horror and monstrous nature that before now

The Tongue of Man never delivered,
The Ear of Man never heard,
The Heart of Man never conceived,
Nor the Malice of Hellish or
Earthly Devil never practised."

To have been the chief executive agent in such a phenomenon of wickedness should be sufficient qualification for any Chamber of Horrors.

It is characteristic of what we call English moderation and capacity for compromise, and unkind foreigners call cold-blooded lack of principle, that the Reformation in England never produced a really major upheaval. There were risings such as the Pilgrimage of Grace and Wyatt's rebellion. There were the Marian persecutions. There was the scare over Titus Oates and the Popish Plot. There was Monmouth's rebellion and the Revolution of 1688. But there

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was never at any time anything like the wars of religion that convulsed France. There was no St. Bartholomew's Eve and no Thirty Years War. Indeed, during the period when Europe was still squabbling about the authority of the Pope, England fought *her* Civil War about the relative authority of King and Parliament.

A cynic might suggest that one reason, at least, for this was that the English Reformation, in its origins at least, was a political and business matter rather than a spiritual one. The crucial step taken by Henry VIII was not the break with Rome, but the seizure and redistribution of the Church lands. When Mary Tudor made the most un-Tudor-like mistake of trying to elevate the religious issue to a matter of principle, she found that many of her subjects were willing for her to have her Pope, as long as they kept their lands. But when they found that Catholicism meant an alliance with Spain and exclusion from trade with America, they decided that Catholicism was bad business. From then it was a short step to decide that it was of the devil as well.

Whilst England has always contained many devoted Catholics therefore, the very nature of her Reformation was such as to leave them with more devotion than power. After the death of Mary Tudor, the various Catholic plots and uprisings always had an air of forlorn hope—of improvization—of lack of basic resources. Even James II, a legitimate reigning King, was forced to fly without striking a blow to save his crown, when confronted by the country's determined Protestantism.

One reason, at least, for this was the skill with which the Cecils, under both Elizabeth and James I, carried on a war of attrition against Catholicism. There was little violent persecution which might have aroused popular sympathy with Catholic martyrs. Rather, the Catholics were subjected to a quiet but remorseless pressure. They could hold no office. They were heavily and continuously fined for refusing to attend Protestant churches, or for actively following their own faith. Their lives and fortunes were not forfeited; but life was made a misery, and fortune gradually sapped.

On the death of Elizabeth and the accession of James I, the Catholics had some hope of better treatment; and indeed, for a short while received it. "Recusants" were no longer fined. Catholics were received at Court and advanced. Greater toleration appeared in various directions. But Cecil was only biding his time. Having given his new master's policy a short run, he succeeded in frightening James, with the bogey of Catholic ambitions and Protestant resentment, into a complete reversal of policy. Thereafter, the old process of attrition began again, and with renewed bitterness and ingenuity.

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The natural result was disappointment amounting almost to despair amongst Catholics. They had hoped for much from James. Before, they had been persecuted. Now they felt themselves betrayed as well. It was in this atmosphere of bitter treatment and desperation that the Gunpowder Plot was laid.

At the trial of the conspirators, Coke, the Attorney General, talked a great deal about their devilish cunning and subtlety. In fact, it is doubtful if history can show any plot which contained less of either. The plot was essentially a wild-cat scheme calling for personal courage and self-sacrifice. Apart from that, its main demand seems to have been for a lack of sense of reality, and for a willingness to take a fantastic leap in the dark.

The King and Parliament were to be blown up. The Princess Elizabeth and the little Prince Charles were to be seized. Various Catholic gentry were to be rallied. Princess Elizabeth was to be proclaimed Queen. So much was reasonably clear. But just what was ever intended to happen after that was far less so. Indeed, amongst all the conspirators there does not appear to have been a man whose brains rose much above the level of undergraduate rugby toughs organizing a November Fifth rag. It is perhaps significant that several of them had been involved in the Earl of Essex's rising during the previous reign. Having failed to get themselves executed for one piece of suicidal lunacy, they now wished to try another. Certainly many of them were already marked men in the eyes of the authorities.

This was the calibre of the group of whom, in April, 1604, Guy Fawkes became a member. Like most of the other conspirators, he was in his thirties (he was born in 1570). Unlike many of them, he had never been in trouble with the authorities. Fawkes was not a Catholic born. His father had been an official at the Ecclesiastical Courts of York. But his stepfather was a Catholic, and as an adolescent Fawkes embraced Catholicism, with all the enthusiasm of a convert. (It is an interesting fact that of the main conspirators, half were converts from Protestantism.) For some years he had fought with the Spanish Army in the Low Countries, and he bore a good personal character. He was brought back from Flanders by Thomas Winter, who, with Robert Catesby and John Wright, had already discussed the idea of some kind of Catholic coup. Presumably Wright felt that Fawkes was the type of brave and resolute fanatic who might be useful.

The Plot was formulated and an oath of secrecy taken in May, 1604, the "founder members" being Catesby, Wright, Winter, Fawkes and Thomas Percy. They were all people of some, though not great standing and resources—substantial squires rather than aristocrats. They were all desperate men. They were all, with

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the possible exception of Fawkes, who had been out of the country, "known" to Cecil's secret police; and as far as can be seen, they had not a real brain between them. In order to improve their prospects of success they co-opted, amongst others, Francis Tresham, another marked man, and Sir Everard Digby, another brave, handsome and stupid one. Later additions were of the same quality.

The plot had all the finesse that one would expect from such a group. Renting (from the Crown!) a house next door to the House of Lords, they toiled for months trying to run a tunnel under the building, but were foiled by the thickness of the walls.

Had Parliament met in February, 1605, as originally intended, they must have failed for lack of time. They then succeeded in renting the cellars underneath the House itself, in which they placed thirty six barrels of gunpowder, covered by fuel. The weight of the gunpowder has been variously estimated at thirty hundredweight and five tons. But it was certainly enough to blow up the King's Most Excellent Majesty and the Lords and Commons when they assembled for the Opening of Parliament.

Fawkes was made guardian of the gunpowder; and at the given moment he was to light a slow match, which would give him a quarter of an hour to escape before the explosion took place. Meanwhile certain of the other conspirators were to arrange a rendezvous of Catholic gentry—for an unrevealed purpose—in the Midlands. According to Fawkes' confession, as later published by the authorities, the Princess Elizabeth was to be seized and proclaimed Queen. But Fawkes rather naïvely added that they intended to make no mention of change of religion, nor to have avowed the blowing up of the King and Parliament to have been their work "until we had power enough to make our party good."

Such was the plan. What happened is one of the best-known melodramas in English history. At the end of October Lord Monteagle, himself a Catholic, brother-in-law of Tresham, and a friend of several of the conspirators, received the famous anonymous letter warning him not to attend the opening of Parliament. In its original form it runs:

> "*My lord out of the love i beare to some of youer friends i have a caer of youer preservacion therefor i would advyse yowe as yowe tender youer lyf to devyse some excuse to shift of youer attendance at this parleament for god & man hath concurred to punish the wickedness of this tyme and thinke not slightlye of this advertisement but retyere youreselfe into your countri wheare youwe maye expect the event in safti for thowghe theare be no apparence of anni stir ye I saye they shall receyve a terrible blowe this parleament and yet they shall not seie who hurt them this*

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councel is not to be contemned because it maye do yowe good and can do yowe no harme for the dangere is passed as soon as yowe have burned the letter and i hope god will give yowe the grace to make good use of it to whose holy protection i commend yowe."

Having caused this letter, on its receipt, to be read aloud at his dinnertable, Monteagle, alarmed, took it post-haste to Cecil. (The fact that it was read aloud conveniently permitted one Ward, who was present, to warn Winter that it had arrived and was in Cecil's hands.) Tradition, which may or may not be a reliable guide, says that the letter was written by Tresham.

Cecil's reaction was interesting. For nearly a week he either did nothing, or appeared to do nothing. Then he placed the letter before the King. Just who decided to do what, will never be known. But the upshot was that the Lord Chamberlain and others visited the cellar where Fawkes was on guard over the gunpowder, which was, of course, concealed by fuel. The Lord Chamberlain even questioned Fawkes in a casual way, as to who he was, and to whom the fuel belonged. But he seemed satisfied with the answers and went away. Fawkes, however, was not entirely convinced by the Lord Chamberlain's apparent casualness, and hastened to warn the others. Even the Gunpowder Conspirators, who appear to have been capable of a good deal of optimism, agreed that such a marvellous narrow escape was rather too good to be true. They had already been warned that the authorities were on the trail, and the Lord Chamberlain's visit appears finally to have convinced them.

Less desperate men would simply have fled. As it was, part of the gang rode hard for the Midlands, to the arranged rendezvous with the other Catholic gentry; others stayed concealed in London to watch developments; and the devoted Fawkes, with supreme courage, went back to his post in the cellar, intending, at the first sign of danger, to blow up the place and, if necessary, himself.

Even in this last suicidal resolve he was foiled. For shortly after midnight he was surprised and taken by a small armed guard. The accounts of his arrest vary, and it is not at all clear whether he was seized in the cellar, or going in, or coming out. Having seized him, they proceeded to uncover his mine.

With the taking of Fawkes the plot naturally fell to pieces. The conspirators, with characteristic muddle-headedness, first hurriedly dispersed those who had come to the Midland rendezvous, and then decided to try to rally them again. Failing, they made for Holbeach House, accidentally injured themselves in an explosion caused by drying gunpowder before the fire, and on November 8th

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were taken, almost without resistance, by the Sheriff of Worcester and his posse. Catesby, Percy and the two Wrights, the leading spirits of the plot, contrived to die in the half-hearted affray, and thus to escape worse. The others were less fortunate.

Meanwhile, Guy Fawkes, the first to be taken, was tortured to make him reveal the names of his associates. But none of them seriously denied his guilt, and their trial and execution was a matter of form—except for Tresham, who died rather mysteriously in the Tower; and Henry Garnet, Superior of the Jesuits, whose exact degree of complicity in the plot was, and remains, somewhat doubtful, and about whose execution the Government seems to have hesitated.

Such is the traditional story. It has the dubious authority of the *True and Perfect Relation*, issued by the authorities. Apart from Providence, which is frequently mentioned, the credit for the discovery of the plot is mainly given to King James himself, who is represented as having divined not only the nature of the plot, but most of its details, from the cryptic anonymous letter sent to Monteagle. There has been a good deal of sarcastic laughter over this version—much of it justified. After all, Cecil's secret police were extremely efficient. Catholics in general were suspect, and several of the chief conspirators were already marked men.

It is, to put it mildly, unlikely that the anonymous letter to Monteagle was the first inkling that the authorities received of a plot that had been in existence for months; and even if it was, it is even more unlikely that in the week during which the letter was in Cecil's hands, before it was shown to the King, he took no action and discovered nothing. The picture we are given of Cecil and his colleagues as unsuspecting innocents, eventually directed to the truth at the last possible moment solely by the Sherlock Holmes-like brilliance of James, is charming enough, but slightly lacking in realism.

There remains the fascinating question of how much Cecil knew, and at what point. It has been suggested, of course, that there was no plot at all, and that the whole business was engineered by Cecil to discredit the Catholics, in much the same way as Goering is said to have burnt down the German Reichstag, in order to throw the blame for the outrage on Communists. This seems to me over-ingenious. That the plot existed, and existed in the general form implied by the authorities, is put beyond reasonable doubt by the attitude of the accused at their trial, which was plainly that of conspirators who know the game is up, rather than of innocent men being tried on fabricated charges.

On the other hand, there are a number of other aspects of the whole matter which certainly are very odd indeed, and which seem

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to suggest not only naïvete but positive co-operativeness on the part of the authorities. The conspirators are able to rent a house belonging to the Crown next door to the House of Lords. When their plan for a mine fails, they are able to rent the cellars of the House itself.

Percy, who arranged these things, was well known to be an ardent Catholic; and in each instance another tenant had to be ejected to make room for the conspirators. The authorities could hardly have been more helpful. Again, when Monteagle receives the mysterious letter, he has it read aloud, and one Ward, who was present, at once warns Thomas Winter of the letter's existence and of the fact that it is in the hands of Cecil. If Ward, who was not a conspirator, knew that Winter would be interested, how many other people knew? Indeed, it appears that via Ward, via Monteagle, the conspirators were, throughout, kept in touch with what the authorities were thinking—or appeared to be thinking—about the whole business.

Further, when, after several weeks' absence Fawkes returned to his post in the cellar on November 3rd, his return corresponded almost exactly with the time fixed by Cecil for an examination of the cellar. Yet no step was taken to apprehend him or even to question him very closely. The Lord Chamberlain took surprisingly little interest in him and his heap of fuel, and he was able to warn the other conspirators that everything was getting uncomfortably hot.

Finally, though Fawkes was a desperate man who would not have hesitated, on his own statement, to blow up the place and himself with it to avoid arrest, he was in fact surprised and taken by the party which, ostensibly, only came to make a rather more thorough search of the cellar than the Lord Chamberlain.

It seems to me fairly obvious that from some indefinable but quite early stage in the whole drama, Cecil knew that a plot was going forward, and was playing his characteristic waiting game with the conspirators, giving them enough rope to hang themselves. Whether the Monteagle letter was genuine, or a part of the whole process, we shall never know. But throughout one gets the impression that the conspirators were being almost ostentatiously warned of their danger, in order to make them reveal themselves by flight or precipitate action. The most likely explanation appears to be that while Cecil knew of the plot, he needed time to learn the details and the identity of all those concerned. The irresistible impression is of a game of poker between a silent expert and a set of reckless novices.

Elizabethan England, at its best, could produce that type of Renaissance Complete Man of which Philip Sidney is the most

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famous example. In such, to be a man of action was not incompatible with being a man of thought, nor physical courage with sensibility. But the age produced plenty of others, who, whilst they had many of its finer characteristics and much of its colourfulness, lacked the intellectual maturity and balance which makes Sidney almost irritatingly admirable. Essex, in many ways a magnificent creature, brought about his own death by a positively childish lack of judgment; and many of his intimates, such as Christopher Blount, seem to have shown the same type of immaturity.

They were brave, handsome, of noble mind, and by no means insensitive; but they were not adult; and they constantly remind us that Elizabethan England was a new growth, only a few years removed from the Middle Ages. We know that several of the Gunpowder Plot Conspirators had been associates of Essex and his friends, and we can recognize clearly, in the whole design and operation of the plot, its family likeness to the Earl's farcical "rising." There is no proper organization and no very clear intention. One draws one's sword and marches through the streets of London; or one makes a beautiful loud bang with a lot of gunpowder; and after that, in some mysterious way, everything will be put right.

One has little doubt that men like Catesby and Everard Digby were of this type. Their whole history suggests it. Whether Guy Fawkes was, is less certain. The information about him is small. He was certainly an ardent Catholic and a brave man. But whether his bravery sprang from his religious convictions and made him a gallant fanatic, or whether it was the typical reckless courage of the times, it is impossible to say. Neither his confession nor the few words he said at his trial tell us much about him. They are quite compatible with the view that he was what is sometimes euphemistically called "a simple soldier."

Nevertheless, Fawkes has left an impression in popular history, in fact, he may almost be said to have left two slightly contradictory ones. The first is as a purely formal, symbolical figure of villainous conspiracy, labelled "*Bad Man. V. dangerous*," fit to be burnt on bonfires. The second is of a brave man who risked his life for a cause, however misguided, and when the gamble failed, staunchly refused to betray his friends.

It is pleasant to see society for once giving one of its convicted enemies his due, and distinguishing between its opinion of his actions and of his personal character. Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that this attitude towards Fawkes carries generosity rather far. The reason, presumably, is that about the whole business of the Gunpowder Plot there hangs a faint air of farce, which makes anything more than a purely formal indignation difficult. Yet

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while the Plot, when discovered and foiled, certainly has its farcical and even its slightly pathetic aspects, these things would have been considerably less apparent if it had been carried out. Some hundreds of people would have been brutally, indiscriminately, and rather objectlessly murdered. The most charitable thing that could be said about Fawkes and his fellow-conspirators is that they were criminal lunatics of the highest principle. And, while it cannot be denied that Fawkes showed great courage in returning to his post in the cellar after the Lord Chamberlain's visit, and that he did his best to shield his accomplices, it is scarcely true, as is sometimes implied, that he was phenomenal in his loyalty and devotion in the manner of a misguided martyr. Fawkes' confession was obtained from him by torture, and it would be fantastic to criticize the poor wretch for making it. But the fact remains that there have been plenty of men in the history of the world who have suffered every species of torture rather than betray their friends or a cause. Fawkes displayed, in fact, the type of courage in a murderous cause that many men, in many countries, have displayed in good ones.

Indeed, if there is any doubt that Fawkes was a major villain, it arises mainly from the fact that he was no more guilty than his fellow conspirators.

Our conclusion about Fawkes must be, I think, that as far as our information goes, he showed no sign of the intellectual stature necessary for greatness of any kind—even greatness in evil. He was not an originator of evil, but merely its gallant and willing instrument. Catesby and Percy, the men who designed the Plot in all its desperate, gangster ruthlessness, have a far better claim to be representative of the spirit of evil. It may well be that popular history, which continues to burn Fawkes in effigy whilst taking a somewhat indulgent and sentimental view of him personally, is expressing for once a fairly shrewd view of the whole affair.

And it is as a symbol only that he really exists. It is the Old Guy—and the Old Guy is not a person but an idea, which the writer of Morality Plays would perhaps have recognized and understood more clearly than we do. When the Devil is unsuccessful—as always in fiction, but not always in life—he becomes not only laughable but mildly pitiable. It is only when he succeeds that he need be taken seriously. Evil, to most of us, is still partly an event, and not merely an intention.

★ *This study in conspiracy is included in NIGEL BALCHIN's new book "The Anatomy of Villainy," to be published soon by Messrs. William Collins.*

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DAUGHTERS OF EVE

Trust a woman ?
I'll trust the devil first . . .

JOHN FLETCHER, 1579-1625

A fellow that lives in a windmill, has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman . . .

WILLIAM CONGREVE, 1670-1729, *The Way of The World*

Computation

If all the harm that women have done
Were put in a bundle and rolled into one,
Earth would not hold it,
The sky could not enfold it,
It could not be lighted or warmed by the sun ;
Such masses of evil
Would puzzle the devil
And keep him in fuel while Time's wheels run.

But if all the harm that's been done by men
Were doubled and doubled and doubled again,
And melted and fused into vapour and then
Were squared and raised to the power of ten,
There wouldn't be nearly enough, not near,
To keep a small girl for the tenth of a year.

J. K. STEPHEN, 1859-1892

Not, Madam, a Rolling Eye—

—I am half distracted, captain Shandy, said Mrs. Wadman, holding up her cambrick handkerchief to her left eye, as she approach'd the door of my uncle Toby's sentry box—a mote—or sand—or something—I know not what, has got into this eye of mine —do look into it—it is not in the white—

In saying which, Mrs. Wadman edged herself close in beside my uncle Toby . . . Do look into it—said she.

Honest soul! Thou didst look into it with as much innocency of heart as ever child look'd into a raree-shew-box ; and 'twere as much a sin to have hurt thee . . .

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I protest, Madam, said my uncle Toby, I see nothing whatever in your eye.

It is not in the white, said Mrs. Wadman: my uncle Toby look'd with might and main into the pupil—

Now of all the eyes which ever were created . . . there never was an eye of them all, so fitted to rob my uncle Toby of his repose, as the very eye, at which he was looking—it was not, Madam, a rolling eye—a romping or a wanton one—nor was it an eye sparkling—petulant or imperious—of high claims and terrifying exactions, which would have curdled at once that milk of human nature, of which my uncle Toby was made up—but 'twas an eye full of gentle salutations—and soft responses—speaking—not like the trumpet stop of some ill-made organ, in which many an eye I talk to holds coarse converse—but whispering soft—like the last low accent of an expiring saint—" How can you live comfortless, captain Shandy, and alone, without a bosom to lean your head on—or trust your cares to ? "

It was an eye—

But I shall be in love with it myself, if I say another word . . .

LAURENCE STERNE, 1713-1768, *Tristram Shandy*

Summing Up

Sum be nyse, and some be fonde,
And some be tame, ye understonde,
And some cane take brede of a manes hande . . .

Som be browne, and some be whit,
And some be tender as a ttripe,
And some of theym be chiry ripe,
Yit all thei be not soo.
Sume be lewde,
And some be schrewede,
go wher they goo.

Author unknown, Fifteenth Century

Triple Alliance

Anne Kemyns, Nichs Gays daughter and one Davy were all carted about the Towne for their filthie and lascivious Life and the next day being friday they satt all three at the high Cross in the Stocks.

Philip Wyot, Town Clerk of Barnstaple,
Diary, April 28th, 1588

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The Price

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.'
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
'The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue.'
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

A. E. HOUSMAN, 1859-1936, *A Shropshire Lad*

Circe

So they shouted to attract attention, and the next moment Circe came out, opened the polished doors, and invited them to enter. In their innocence, the whole party except Eurylochus followed her in. Circe ushered the rest into her hall, gave them settles and chairs to sit on, and then prepared them a mixture of cheese, barley-meal, and yellow honey flavoured with Pramnian wine.

But into this dish she introduced a powerful drug, to make them lose all memory of their native land. And when they had emptied the bowls in which she had served them, she struck them with her wand, drove them off and penned them in the pigsties. For now to all appearance they were swine: they had pigs' heads and bristles, and they grunted like pigs; but their minds were as human as they had been before the change. Indeed, they shed tears in their sties.

HOMER, *The Odyssey, translated by E. V. Rieu*

Last Word

Thanks be to God, the world is wide,
And I am going far from home!
And I forgot in Camelot
The man I loved in Rome.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY,
Fugitive

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WATERFRONT

"There are some things," said the chief mate, "that are best left alone"

by JACLAND MARMUR

THEY had lots of fun with little Benny Larkman in Louie's *Embarcadero* dockland pub. They knew that if you oiled him right he was bound to spin another one of his cock-eyed deepwater yarns. They were 'longshore and seafaring men themselves in there: even Louie Chavez used to sail second steward for the Connaught Line. So they knew Benny's yarns went overboard. Benny didn't intend to lie. He just wanted to be friendly.

Benny peddled souvenirs, mouth organs, and costume jewellery for seamen's girls, along the pierheads of the city's waterfront, and the yarns were part of his stock in trade. Making his curbside sales-talk from China Basin to Fisherman's Wharf, he got lonely. So when he worked as far as the *Embarcadero*, he'd drop in for a beer or two. The minute he pushed open the doors with his battered suit-case in his hand and his flat straw hat on the back of his head, some-one would tip the wink to Louie Chavez behind the bar. Louie always waited till Benny sat down and had had his beer drawn, and then he'd come over with a double Scotch on the metal tray.

"On the house," he'd say. "You look tired, Benny. You need a lift."

Benny would smile a funny, crooked smile. He didn't like whisky. It often made him ill. But he never refused. How could he? A man in need of fellowship doesn't care to count the cost. He'd toss the stuff off smartly, gulping some beer to help it down and doing his best to grin.

Louie slyly kept the glass full, and the first thing Benny knew, his heart and his soul enlarged. He thought he was walking a quarter-deck somewhere a couple of thousand miles away. He was talking about it, reminding himself of the beautiful names and the places hull under and far away. He was telling himself all the wonderful things he had always wanted to do, and never really had. That's when some hardcase bosun would chuckle in his throat and a second mate off a cargo ship, lifting an elbow at Louie's bar, would join in with a quick guffaw. All of a sudden the whole place rocked,

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and Benny would hear the laughter roar. It hurt him. He never let on, though. He didn't dare.

"Damn shame, Benny!" Louie Chavez would be grinning behind the bar. "Wasting a yarn like that. If we'd only had some first-trip kids here, you'd've peddled off half your junk."

"Course, Louie. I got to go. I ain't made a penny yet."

Benny walked as straight as he could, going out through Louie's doors. That's how it happened every time. A big-boned chief engineer off a lumber schooner summed it up neatly once.

"Them loafers are a part of every waterfront," he rumbled. "They're the ocean's hangers-on. P'rhaps they made a coasting trip to sea when they were kids. The wonder touched them, and the mark remains. They come drifting to the foreshore. Like Benny. Telling themselves tall tales. It's as close as he can ever get again to deep blue water. Why the devil don't you leave him be!"

It was compassionate advice. But the admonition of mercy is difficult to follow where laughter is at stake. Benny kept coming back, as defenceless as a lamb, and they couldn't miss a treat like that. Benny never let them down. He always gave them a first class story. He had to. It was all he had left of dignity. And one dull afternoon, with business fairly slack, Benny pitched the finest yarn of his career in Louie's *Embarcadero*.

Perhaps the sudden April sunshine did it. Or perhaps it was the girl. You didn't often see a girl in Louie's. Not a girl like that. She had coppery hair, blue wistful eyes, and a sultry mouth. From the way she looked at the dark-headed youngster sitting beside her, you knew he was embarking and that she was wondering how she'd go on living after he went away. The young fellow, though, wasn't wondering about anything. He hadn't much use for the beer and sandwiches in front of him on the white topped table against the wall. He was starry-eyed.

"Dave's past Mile Rock already, Dad," the girl was saying to the mild-eyed man on her other side. "He's off soundings and far away." Her voice was a rich contralto. It had a stirring quality. "He hardly knows I'm here."

"Ah, Linda, no. Don't put it that way. It's just—"

He broke off, grinning. Linda's father was heavily built and middle aged, with sparse, pale hair and a sunburned face. Louie had never seen him before. Chief mate, Louie guessed, off some ocean-going ship. He sat there with one hand in his coat pocket, gravely watching slow bubbles rise in the glass in front of him.

"He won't listen to me, Dad!" the girl said fiercely. "He won't even listen to you. Were you like that when you were—?"

"Perhaps, Linda." The chief mate sighed. "P'rhaps I was."

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That's when little Benny Larkman came pushing through Louie's doors. He stopped a moment, blinking and looking shyly round. "Jute!" said Benny suddenly. "I smell raw jute!"

"Don't, Benny!" Louie Chavez knew all the little hawker's gambits. "Not today," he growled.

Benny hoisted his suitcase on to a table and pushed his straw hat back on his head. "I tell you, Louie, I smell raw jute! I can—"

"Rubbish!" said Louie. "Nobody here today but a couple of locals and Chubby Harris over there from Pier Sixteen."

"I just tied up a Sacramento River barge. Spuds," grinned Chubby Harris. "Give him a beer on me, Louie. It's the potato sacks he smells!"

One of the tugboat men thought that rather clever. He chortled in his glass, giving Louie a wink. Benny sat down, mopping his brow. He was hot and tired, and all he wanted was a nice, cool bottle of lager. He wished he hadn't blurted that out, because here came Louie with his metal tray. Benny gave him his crooked smile, trying to muster courage enough to tell him he didn't want any whisky. But Louie Chavez was snorting, "Jute!" He was in a derisive mood. "You an' your—"

"Man's got a sharp nose, Steward. Came in four days ago. Ship *Willapama*. From the Hugli. Finish discharging today. Calcutta jute."

Benny turned his head at that placid voice. There wasn't any laughter in it. Benny was so accustomed to people's laughter, he was taken off his guard.

"Mr. Mate," said Louie Chavez, "you should never have told him that! Now he'll start for sure on one of his cock-eyed yarns."

Benny didn't hear that. He saw the girl, and the dark-headed boy beside her with the stardust in his eyes. And he saw the red-faced mate of a deepwater cargo vessel just in from Sandheads far over across the sea. Something happened to Benny. It began to glow in his eyes. "I won't never forget the smell of jute," he said. "Not if I live a hundred years."

"I wish you'd stop it, Mister," the girl's low voice was pleading. "Dave's bad enough already."

"First trip. That right, Dave?" Benny could spot a novice half a mile away. "She don't want you to go. I know," he said. "I can tell."

"That's right," Dave murmured. "Neither does her father here. He says a man's a fool to go to sea. But I'm already signed on in his ship." The boy was awkwardly squirming big shoulders. "Gosh, if I miss this chance I'll—"

"Who wants to marry a man and then spend half your life

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alone ? " The girl's eyes flashed. " What's out there, anyway ? Is the sunshine brighter ? Is— ? "

" Out there ? " Benny tipped back his head. " There's the bluest, deepest water in the world out there. Perhaps Dave's heard about the turtles, floating a hundred miles offshore in the Gulf of Tehuantepec. Or the giant lizards they say still live on the islands called the Laccadives. P'rhaps they're there. P'rhaps they're not. Man's got a right to go see for himself."

Dave's eyes were shining. Linda saw it. And she saw how her father, the chief mate, frowned. But Benny was looking aloft. " Don't stop him, Linda," Benny went on. " You might regret it for the rest of your life. I know. I had a girl once. Like you. Just as young, and almost as beautiful. I was going to sea myself. That's when I smelled raw jute. It was very long ago."

" What did I tell you ? " growled Louie from behind the bar. " Here we go again ! "

" Go ahead, Benny ! "

" Can't he lay off for once ? "

That was Chubby Harris, chuckling, and a local tugboat man. Benny didn't even hear them. He was far away, and young again. He was hearing the rush of a sunset shower pelting across a wine-dark sea. He wasn't in Louie's place at all. The Indian Ocean monsoon moaned across Mauritius, and Louie's walls disintegrated in the growling thunder of distant surf. Benny was in a rust-hulled tramp called the *Lamabar*, down to her marks with Baltimore coal for Colombo.

The *Lamabar* was standing out to sea through a blue-green coral channel, after bunkering at Port Louis. The Old Man, willing to earn a few extra pounds, had twenty-odd Tamils for deck passengers in the after well—big, dark skinned, Ceylon men from the *Patana*, indentured labourers going back to the place they called their home. Benny was the lean, hard whip of a boy in the chief mate's watch. He was leaning on the rail of the fo'c'sle head, looking at the sunset.

Benny was watching the land soak darkness like a sponge, receding as the space of ocean deepened and the landswell grew. He could hear the jabber of an outland tongue drift to him from the after deck where the Tamils muttered among themselves, spreading their mats against advancing night. And he could see the captain leaning against the rail up there on the bridge.

That's where Benny Larkman meant to walk one day. Meantime the wonder and mystery poured over him, drenched him. He was young enough. When the *Lamabar* came home past Ambrose Light, he'd have some things to tell a girl called Isabel ! Benny pulled his mouth organ out of his pocket and carelessly blew some

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plaintive chords. The sound was pleasing to him, and he smiled.

"How long?" he asked the carpenter, "how long from here to Colombo, Chips?"

"What's it matter? More days more money, Benny."

"What's money got to do with it?" Benny blew another minor chord and tapped the mouth organ on his palm. "Is it true, Chips, that there's great white sea snakes swimming in the ocean off Ceylon?"

"Rubbish!"

"I heard it told a man could only see them just when sunrise broke off Dondra Head."

"Hogwash! You stick round at sea in lousy ships, like some I know of, and you'll see snakes, all right. But not the kind you think."

Benny laughed. He had a quick, explosive, little laugh. "Just the same," he said, "I'm glad I got the morning watch. I'm goin' to keep a sharp lookout. Perhaps I'll be lucky. You can never tell."

Just then the wheelhouse made eight bells. The clear, quick, double strokes left only tinkling echoes down along the foredeck. Benny heard them, and he grinned. There was no finer sound on earth for Benny Larkman than that fragile record of the passing time at sea. It stirred him most at night with darkness on the water, the ocean's rushing slap against the forefoot, spindrift hissing somewhere, and the monsoon's moan aloft. The *Lamabar* had a sweet-tongued bell.

Benny heard it often while the *Lamabar* climbed up the southern latitudes, rocking slowly north and east. He heard it on that night far north of Chagos when the monsoon slept and the moon made a shining road upon the sea. Benny had the fo'c'sle lookout. He remembered how the Tamils mumbled their outlandish gibberish and how their charcoal braziers winked against the darkness as they squatted in the after well, cooking evening rice. That night the wheel house bell rang sweeter than it ever had before. Benny tolled his answer smartly at the windlass and he called his, "Lights are bright, sir," proudly to the mate up on the bridge.

"She's all yours, Charlie," Benny said to his relief. "Fine and clear. Fellow might see whales on the water or St. Elmo's fire at the masthead on a night like this. Be just my luck to miss it."

"Kid, you're screwy," Charlie growled. "Damn that mess-boy's coffee. Tastes like lye." He snorted. "That midship deck feels hot to me. Wonder if I shouldn't tell the third mate. P'rhaps Pinky oughta know."

Benny made no comment. He climbed down the ladder, humming. Later, he lay wakeful in his bunk to sense a while the rhythm of the swinging ship and all the groaning, chuckling, little sounds she made. He would tell all this to Isabel. If he could let her

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know the stirring beauty of it, she was bound to understand. He heard the watch make four bells, and he thought he heard the rattle of the black gang's ash-hoist. That's the last thing he remembered before he fell away in dreamless sleep.

Benny gave no thought to the hot deck Charlie felt through the rope soles of his canvas shoes. He had never sailed with coal before. But Charlie was right. Deep in the ship's holds it was glowing, building heat and gas for no one knew how long. It let go in the middle watch. Without warning. Suddenly the deck plates buckled. The *Lamabar* was trembling. Only for an instant, though. Then she erupted in one long, enormous roar.

The explosive fury filled the night, hurling glowing debris. It flung Benny half across the fo'c'sle from his bunk. He crawled out, dazed. He staggered for the twisted ladder of what was left of the bridge deck. He could hear the Tamils up there, screaming in a frantic cluster by the splintered starboard boats. The ship was listing, steam roaring somewhere. He thought he saw the young third officer, the fellow they called Pinky, quiet at the portside davits. Just as Benny started that way something struck him, felling him. He was sliding down the incline of the deck. He felt the shock of water closing over him. Just before the blackness reached him he began to thrash.

The next thing Benny Larkman knew, he was flat on the bottom boards of an open boat. When he opened his eyes the dawn was beginning to filter across the sea. He saw the *Lamabar*'s third mate erect in the sternsheets over him, the steering oar in his hands. Two sad-eyed Tamils were on the thwarts, slowly pulling. Two others sat forward, bailing. Benny sat up.

" You had a bad knock. We fished you out," said the *Lamabar*'s third mate. " You all right now ? "

" Yes, sir. Fine, sir. Where—? "

" Never mind the ' sir.' Not here. I'm Pinky." He looked with bitterness around a circle of the waste of heaving sea. There was nothing in sight of the *Lamabar* except charred odds and ends of flotsam. " If they got another boat away, we lost them in the dark. I doubt it . . . Your name's Ben, isn't it ? "

" Yes, sir. I mean, yes, Pinky. I was in the chief mate's watch."

" Okay, Ben. Let's ship the rudder. Then we'll step the mast and set the lugs'l. No use hunting round here any more. There's no one else."

That's how it began. Remnants of the night still hung in all the dark, steep hollows of the seas. But daylight sparkled on the crests, and Benny Larkman heard the whimper of the rising wind, the close wash and stutter of the ocean all around. It sounded louder here, more threatening, its vastness plain, its power and its dreadful

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strength. Benny was frightened, no mistake. But a small voice told him he was shipwrecked. He! Himself! And he was sure he would outlive it. Benny almost grinned, thinking all the things he'd have to tell to Isabel.

"We can't beat to windward for the Maldive Islands," he heard the third mate say. "Not against a southwesterly monsoon. I reckon we're nearly three hundred miles from Ceylon, but the wind is fair. It ought to hold so. Perhaps we'll be picked up. Perhaps not. Steer north. Nothing to the eastward, Ben. Remember that."

"I'll remember, Pinky. You better take a spell."

"If we ever get Dondra Head to leeward, we're finished. We could never fetch it, beating back. We'll be dead. I'll pass rations out at sunset. Not before. You watch those Tamils for'ard, Ben. They're scared."

"I'll watch 'em, Pinky. Take a spell. I'll watch 'em good."

It began like that. Benny took the tiller, trimming in the sheet, and by the dancing, little boat-compass, he held the course for north. The Tamils on the bow thwarts watched him from beneath the lugsail's foot. Wide eyed and sorrowful, they never stirred. How could you tell what they were thinking? How could you know how long they'd last? Benny still had his mouth organ in the pocket of his dungarees. He tapped it out and tried it. He found it would still blow some low, sweet cords. One of the Tamils winked his eyes at Benny's music. Benny grinned. He held the tiller bar, and steered for Dondra Head.

That night the *Lamabar*'s third mate passed out biscuits and a quarter pannikin of water. He wasn't much older than Benny. Probably a year or two. He had grey eyes and tousled, fair hair. "Perhaps this will teach you, Ben," he said. "If we ever get ashore, you stay there! Man's a fool who'll spend his life at sea."

"You don't really mean that, Pinky. You wouldn't be here, third mate, if you did. A man's got to learn he can do the things he must. That's what I told Isabel. He's got to find out while he can. He's no damn good if he don't."

"Sure!" Pinky knew what Benny meant. But Pinky had been to sea five years. "You still got dust in your eyes. You think you got the heart of true adventure solid in your hand. Right now! Who the hell could be luckier? You wait, Ben! You'll find out what it costs."

Benny found out all right. Benny and Pinky. They took it watch and watch in an open boat, guarding the water breaker under the after thwart. There was no one else. Except the four dark men up for'ard with the terror growing in their eyes.

The monsoon freshened. Black thunder growled in a leaden sky. The ocean sent white-snarling foam along the racing crests.

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The second night and half another day they rode the sea anchor, bailing desperately while heavy squalls roared overhead.

After that, Benny lost all count of time. The small boat rocked bewitched through an endless succession of blistering sunlight and the long, slow solitudes of night. The water breaker emptied with alarming speed, and the rain they caught had the bitter taste of salt. Pinky grew gaunt and hollow-eyed. Benny knew he looked the same. They spoke in cracked gutturals. Not often any more. Only in necessity, and for the comradeship it gave.

Each day the dark skinned Tamils sat immobile on the bow thwarts, the fitful shadow of the lugsail ranging back and forth. Their luminous, wide eyes were always peering aft. They had an air of stupefaction. This was a thing they couldn't understand. How did they know where Ceylon was, the warm thatch huts of home? Pinky said it lay north-east, beyond the ocean haze. Benny believed it. How could they? They felt destitute and utterly betrayed. They could tolerate so much of hopelessness, and then no more.

Benny was asleep when it happened. It happened in the night. He awoke to a violent motion of the boat, an inarticulate howl of despair. He got to his feet in time to see Pinky's fist lash out in the moonlight, a dark shape crumple and fall. The other Tamils were crawling aft. One of them leaped, and Pinky grappled with him. Benny took a glancing blow across the side of his head. The pain was sharp and stinging. He knew he had the tiller bar unshipped. He was swinging it. He saw the glitter of steel amidships. He heard Pinky grunt. Benny put all his weight in a blow, and he heard the Tamil's knife fall clattering to the bottom boards. Then it was over. Benny was breathing hard, swaying beside the *Lamabar*'s third mate. Blood was dripping down the length of Pinky's arm and hand.

"Better lash 'em to the thwarts, Ben," Pinky gasped. "Poor devils! Just cracked up, that's all. Can't have it. Tie 'em up. Then you better put some kind of tourniquet round this arm. That devil knifed me deep."

How could Benny forget the rest of it? He washed out Pinky's wound with seawater and got the bleeding stopped. Then he put the small boat on her course again and held it. Benny didn't know how long he steered. He only knew he steered for Dondra Head, for that place where fabulous creatures of the sea lived in the profound depth of purple water, showing themselves sometimes at sunrise to the young and fortunate.

By morning Pinky's arm was swelling. By evening he was flushed and feverish. Benny tended him. Benny gave him all the water. And he kept the Tamils lashed up forward in what comfort he could dare. They were pitifully docile now. They made no sound. Benny estimated they were in the latitudes of Ceylon and he hauled

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north-east. He had to. Pinky was in a raging fever. He kept muttering about a yellow headed girl and her devotion. He kept mumbling she deserved much better than to be a sailor's wife. Benny took out his mouth organ. His low, soft music in the darkness soothed Pinky. He grew quieter, and fell asleep at last.

Benny was in command ; all alone. He knew now what adventure was. He knew what Pinky meant. It wasn't moonlight making a shining road across smooth water in a landlocked bay. It wasn't geisha girls and swing music. It was bitter spray across your face. It was a dagger at your throat, a terror in your heart. It was an open boat with hopeless men lashed down. It was a whistling wind behind you and the leaping sea ahead. It was a blinding sunburst in the heavens and a fragmentary glimpse of land when hope was almost dead.

Benny leaped erect, hoarsely croaking. He held his breath until the small boat lifted on the next, long-running crest. There it was again ! A grove of coco palms, fronds sharp against the sky ! The boat was rushing headlong for it. Then a lighthouse tower, pencil-thin against the growing crimson of the dawn. Landfall ! Benny tried to shout the triumph and the wonder. Perhaps he did. Dondra Head ! That was how he saw it.

It came leaping at him, burning with red points of fire. In between the white foam ran. He saw thin plumes of spray leap from the water. Dark-arching shapes were glittering before they plunged beneath the flood again. Black fish? Small whales sounding? Benny knew better. He was certain of what he saw. He understood the miracle of dawn, that time it burst like shellfire over Dondra Head and he was there to see it, steering the *Lamabar*'s boat past half-washed rocks towards a sparkling fringe of surf where it curled against the land.

That's how Benny Larkman brought the *Lamabar*'s survivors in. He remembered the sound of the boat's keel crunching on the shore. He remembered brown people from Matara, peering curiously. Then he thought he saw a white man, sun-helmeted and lean. He looked enormous. Benny tried to stagger towards him, wanting help for Pinky. Benny couldn't reach him. Either the earth or Benny's legs were melting.

The next thing Benny knew, he woke up in a cool white bed. A fellow with thick spectacles and a clipped, grey beard was smiling at him. " You're in Galle Hospital," he said. " You're fine."

" How's Pinky ? How—"

" He'll do. Magnificent infection he had in that arm. Thought at first we'd have to amputate."

" You can't ! " Benny shot upright. " He's a sailor ! What

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good is a sailor with one—"

"Easy now. I didn't say we did. He will carry a scar along his forearm, though, and across the back of his hand. Fingers will probably always be a little stiff. Those ligaments and flexors—" The doctor smiled again. "He's across the corridor. We'll have to keep him here a while. You can see him when you want."

Benny did. Pinky grinned when he came in. They said nothing for some moments. Then a lizard scuttled past a patch of sunlight on the window screen. The sound seemed loud and thinly clear.

"I've got to go up to Colombo," Benny said. "Shipping home, Pinky. Consular workaway."

"You look me up sometime, Ben. I've got a ship—you've got one, too. Any time. If I've got something and you need it, come and ask me. You can have it. Any time."

"I'll wait till you're master, Pinky. Then I'll sail with you. I'll be promoted by that time. Probably second mate."

"Master?" Pinky grinned. "You'll be a skipper long before me, Ben. I've got a chief mate's mark. Never get command. Lots of fellows like that. I can feel it in my bones."

"Rubbish!" said Benny. "You take care of yourself."

"You, too. G'bye."

That's the way it happened. Benny came home from Colombo in a Steel Line ship, two of her holds full of India jute. "I'll never forget how that stuff smells," said Benny Larkman. "Jute. Raw jute. Not if I live a hundred years."

The minute Benny said that, the loud thunder of the ocean ceased. The howling monsoon whimpered into silence and the walls closed in. Benny was back in Louie's dockland pub.

"I never made another trip to sea," said Benny. "I used to blame it all on Isabel. I don't any more. If I'd only had the guts, I could have helped her have the courage, too. She was scared of the sea. She was awfully scared. She was goin' to have a baby. She was scared to be alone. What was a man to do? I got a job ashore. I got lots of jobs. All wrong. She knew it later. Told me so herself. A man's got to learn he can only walk with honour doing the things he must. That's what Isabel decided. The child, he loved the deep blue water, too. He only saw it once. He's gone. So's Isabel."

Benny's voice was taut. "I never looked Pinky up," he said. "I never saw him again. I hope to goodness I never do! I guess he's been a skipper five, ten years by now. Probably got a crack ship in the North Atlantic trade. Me, only license I ever got is a pedlar's license from the police. If Pinky saw me now, he'd be sorry for me. He'd want to toss the old man a few notes."

Benny looked down from the overhead. All of a sudden he

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realized all the crazy things he'd said. He was frightened. He was waiting for the laughter. It should have started long ago. It should have been beating around his ears. And there was Dave, the young sailor with the stardust in his eyes, and Linda, the girl with the coppery hair and the sultry mouth—both staring at him. Linda's father was solemnly draining the last of his drink. He was frowning. He had the air of a man holding urgent decision in frail and momentary balance. Then he exhaled slowly, with a sighing sound.

" Chum," he said, " that's as cock-eyed a yarn as ever I heard. You can certainly tell some good ones."

Benny was grateful. He felt better right away. This was natural. He wasn't so scared. He could let the twisted little grin slip back in place, hearing Louie Chavez guffaw from behind the bar. " I've got to hand it to you, Benny. Open the suitcase ! After a yarn like that, you'd better dish the junk up while the going's good ! "

Benny looked up. " Fine thing ! " he said in disgust. " I spill my heart out—an' you make a crack like that." He was on his feet now, his battered suitcase in his hand. " I'm sick of this joint ! " Then he stopped short suddenly and turned round again.

He brought a mouth organ from his pocket, sliding it across the white-topped table towards the first-trip kid like a bartender sliding beer. " Here ! " he said. " Free. You learn how to play it, Dave. Make good company for you in the middle watch. Louie tipped you off. All my stuff is junk. Not the mouth organs, though. I wouldn't fool no one. Not on a mouth organ."

And Benny Larkman went out through Louie's doors. He never even tried to make them believe him. It left them feeling uneasy.

" He overdone it," Chubby Harris growled. " He never knows when to quit."

Louie Chavez said nothing. He was wearing a puzzled frown. The corner table was empty, too. Louie saw the four silver dollars the chief mate left. The mouth organ was gone. Then Louie looked towards Benny's table, and he wasn't puzzled any more.

" Well, can y'believe it ! " Louie boomed. " He never drunk his whisky ! " Louie started mopping the counter briskly. " No wonder he didn't argue ! "

Outside, the other three were standing on the sunlit walk. " I thought for a minute, Dad, you were going to buy up half his stuff," the girl was saying in her throaty voice.

" I very nearly did," the chief mate murmured. " I just caught myself in time. If I had, he would have guessed. I couldn't do that to him. It would have broken his heart. Twenty five years ! I'm glad he didn't know me. I never would have known him either, but for that yarn. Time has a kindness that way. Like

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clean, white snow upon the earth, concealing things best left unrecognized."

"You go ahead, Dave." Linda turned to look squarely into the eyes of the dark-headed sailor. "You do what you must. Do your job. I'll do mine. But I'll be waiting. I'll always be waiting, Dave."

Dave opened his lips and closed them, saying nothing. He only smiled, taking hold of her hand to draw her arm through his. The big chief mate was absently charging his pipe. Dave had often seen him do it before. This time he clearly noticed the stiffness of the fingers that held the bowl, the narrow scar on the back of that sunburned hand. He knew it ran halfway up the chief mate's arm.

"Do you suppose he really saw them, Mr. Pinkerton?" Dave asked. "I mean the deep sea serpents, sir. Off Dondra Head?"

Mr. Pinkerton was staring north with puckered eyes. He was just in time to see little Benny Larkman nearing a corner of the *Embarcadero*. Benny was drenched in sunlight there. He looked small, walking a little lopsided with his battered suitcase in one hand and his flat straw hat on the top of his head. And he was smiling to himself. Something of glory touched him. He hadn't made anything that afternoon in Louie's place, but he was satisfied. Benny was an artist. He knew what his yarn paid off.

Mr. Pinkerton watched him vanish abruptly round the corner. He wanted to make some signal of salute to little Benny Larkman. And he had to answer Dave. Dave was asking about the great white sea-snakes in the ocean off Dondra Head. Benny had asked the same thing, very long ago. The boy had a right to know.

"Certainly!" Mr. Pinkerton's voice was firm. "Certainly, he saw them! I saw them myself, when I was your age. Come along now. The *Willapama*'s waiting. Time we got on board. Perhaps you'll be lucky, Dave. Perhaps you'll see them, too."

* * *

MAN OF PARTS

Walking down the street one morning, a celebrated conductor encountered a member of his orchestra.

"My, my, but you look prosperous!" the conductor observed. "How do you manage it?"

"Oh, I'm a busy man," replied the musician. "Besides playing in your orchestra, I play in a quartet, give lessons, *and* perform on the radio."

"Really," rejoined the conductor. "May I enquire when you sleep?"

"During rehearsals," came the calm rejoinder.

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UP THE GARDEN PATH

Oh, the deception of it!

by V. S. PRITCHETT

IT was due to the boldness of Mrs. Seugar who always got what she wanted—though why she had wanted Mr. Seugar was not easy to see—that they came to live in the semi detached house called *East Wind*. They were driving through that part of the town one Sunday. Mrs. Seugar was bouncing on the seat and sighing: "Snobby district. I like it snobby, refined, a bit of class." And her little eyes like caterpillar's heads began eating up everything they passed until she saw *East Wind*. The adjoining house was called *West Wind*.

"Oh, stop!" she called out. "Look. How posh! That's the house I want. You could live in a house like that. I mean, be one of the toffs and look down your nose at everyone. I don't mean anything nasty, of course. Get out and see if they'll sell it."

Wherever Mrs. Seugar moved, a spotlight played on her; but Mr. Seugar lived in a deep, damp-eyed shade of shame, the shame of always obliging someone. Unable to step out of it he had shuffled a lot of money out of his shop into his pocket and piled it on to Mrs. Seugar who stood out in the spotlight, seeing that she was taken notice of.

Mr. and Mrs. Seugar left the car, went to the house and were asked in by the man who was to be their landlord. He was having tea in a room lined from floor to ceiling with pictures and books, a very tall man with nothing to remark about him except that as the Seugars advanced he retreated, slipped back like a fish, with eyes like lamps and with a coarse little open mouth. Mrs. Seugar sat herself down and let her legs fall open like a pair of doors.

"I have set my heart on your house. Oh, it's posh, so cute," she said. "Isn't it? Haven't I?" Mr. Seugar with his knees together confirmed it.

"Would you sell it to us?" Mrs. Seugar said.

The landlord poured them out two cups of tea and slipped back into the corner, watching them as if he were having a dream of being robbed. In the end it was he who robbed them. A far away scholar and fluting gentleman, he asked a tremendous price: Mrs. Seugar

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was hung about with so much gold. But first of all he put them off. They could have, not this house, but the one next door.

"I own both," he said.

"Who lives next door?" said Mrs. Seugar. "Ask him who lives next door. Why should *I* talk—oh, it's so snobby," she said to her husband.

"Who . . ." began Mr. Seugar.

"No one," said the landlord.

"Then you can move in next door and we can move in here," cried Mrs. Seugar. "What did I say? Would you believe it—I said to my husband that's the house I want, go and ask, but he wouldn't. He makes objections to everything—well, I call it daft to make objections all the time. People look down on me for marrying him. I don't mean anything nasty, of course."

The shadow of shame came down like a dark shop blind over Mr. Seugar and indeed that is where his mind was—in his shop. In half an hour the landlord was showing them round the house, Mr. Seugar following them like a sin, giving a glance into every room after the other two had gone on, being called forward for lagging behind. When the visit was done, Mr. Seugar bought the house, wiping his feet up and down on the carpet as he did so, crying inside himself at the tremendous price; and bewildered because in buying something that could not be wrapped up in paper and slipped into his overcoat pocket, he felt exposed.

When they got home and shut their door, Mrs. Seugar began to shout everything she said. He was snobby, the landlord; it was a pleasure to hear him talk the way the snobs talk, la-di-da! It was lovely; but if you haven't the cash it doesn't help you being a snob. She felt at ease having someone to look down on straight away.

"He's a recluse," said Mr. Seugar.

"He isn't," shouted Mrs. Seugar, grabbing her new capture back from her husband. "He never stopped staring at me. I could have died," she shouted. "Fancy him letting us have the house like that, no questions asked. Funny thing him living in that house all his life—he must have got sick of it—and me killing myself to have it; it shows you never know."

At the end of the month Mrs. Seugar led her furniture into *East Wind* and when it was all in, Mr. Seugar followed it like a mourner. They settled in and Mrs. Seugar sat there with her legs wide apart and her shoes kicked off, going through the names of all the people she was going to look down her nose at.

"Listen," said Mr. Seugar from the shade. No shop-bell to call them, no one popping in from down the street; they were hearing

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the only sound in their lives: the landlord poking his fire in the house next door.

"Talk," said his wife to her husband. "But for me you wouldn't be here. Say something. Not business. Talk snobby. Oh," sighed Mrs. Seugar. "I bet you talk in the shop. I've got everything on," she said, having a look at her gold watch, her diamond brooch and so on, "and I feel a fool, you sitting there with your trap closed. A snob would talk."

At that moment they both started. The front door was being opened, shoes were being wiped, there were steps in the hall.

"What's that?" said Mr. Seugar.

"Burglars, I'd welcome it," said Mrs. Seugar.

Mr. Seugar went out and met their landlord walking down the hall. He was just putting a key into his pocket. He was surprised by Mr. Seugar, murmured something, walked on and then was stopped by the sight of their stair carpet. Murmuring again, he flicked like a fish sideways into the sitting room, looked at Mrs. Seugar in a lost way and then sat down.

"I've been for a walk," he said.

"A constitootional," said Mr. Seugar.

"Shut up, Henry," said Mrs. Seugar, "until remarks are addressed to you."

The landlord looked round the room where his pictures and his books had been and then glanced at the Seugars.

"Dreadfully late," he said suddenly, went to the window which was a low one, opened it and stepped over the sill. Once over, he walked down the garden into his own garden next door.

"Dreadfully, awfully, frightfully—late," Mrs. Seugar was repeating in ecstasy.

Mr. Seugar came out of his shame:

"Blimey. See that? Forgot he's moved! He's still got the key."

A terrible quarrel broke out between the Seugars. That was a call, Mrs. Seugar said. No, it wasn't, said Mr. Seugar, it was a mistake. Mr. Seugar was so ill-bred he hadn't realized it was a call but must pass remarks. If a visitor says "walk" you don't say "constitootional" afterwards, correcting him. Why repeat? It's daft. Not only that, he came to see *her*, not Mr. Seugar. A man, Mrs. Seugar said, was what she wanted. Her ideal, who talked soft and gave you a good time; a lovely man, not the fairy prince and all that twaddle, but a recluse who could fascinate you and give you things.

"Out of mean spite you gave him the bird," she said to Mr. Seugar. Mr. Seugar did not know what to do. At last he got a spade and went out to the garden to dig.

The next day just as lunch was put on the table in came the land-

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lord, walked straight into the dining room, ahead of Mr. Seugar, sat down in Mr. Seugar's place before the joint and started to carve.

" Henry ! " said Mrs. Seugar.

Mr. Seugar said nothing. Their landlord handed them their plates and then rang the bell for an extra one. Mrs. Seugar talked about her summer holiday. People were stand-offish there, she said, and she could not get a corset.

" I apologize for the beef," said the landlord.

Mrs. Seugar kicked Mr. Seugar under the table.

" D'you believe millions now living will never die ? " asked Mrs. Seugar to keep conversation going. " I mean they'll live, not pass out. It sounds daft. We had a circular. We put up a notice saying *No Hawkers, No Circulars*, but that doesn't stop some people. Not never die ! They must be fools to think that ; what some people's minds get on, they must be empty. I want a bit of life."

" Millions now living ? " asked the landlord. " Will never die ? "

" I'm surprised," said Mrs. Seugar, " they are allowed to give out circulars like that in a neighbourhood like this."

" I am sorry, I do apologize for the sweet," said the landlord. " It is my fault. I am awfully thoughtless. I will make a confession."

" A confession. Oh ! " cried Mrs. Seugar, clapping her hands.

" It is terrible," said the landlord. It was one of his longest speeches, " I forgot I asked you to lunch."

" Henry," said Mrs. Seugar. " Close your mouth, we don't want to see what you've eaten."

Presently the landlord looked at the pattern on the plates, then at the table and the walls. He got up and went suddenly out.

" You can see what has happened," said Mrs. Seugar.

" What I said yes'day, day before," said Mr. Seugar.

They sat there staring at the table, terrified.

" He's barmy," said Mr. Seugar humbly—the customer is always right. " He's forgot he's moved. Like people who order the same groceries twice."

" Father," said Mrs. Seugar—she always called him father when she was accusing him : he had failed in the course of marriage, to give her any children. " Ever since we've been up here you've shown you're not used to it. Why didn't you tell me you asked him in ? "

" Who carved the joint ? Who's barmy ? " said Mr. Seugar.

" I was glad for him to carve. It used to be his house. I have manners if some people haven't," said Mrs. Seugar.

Mr. Seugar began one of his long, low, ashamed laughs, a laugh so common that Mrs. Seugar said he could keep that for the next time. Mr. Seugar stopped suddenly and kept it for that. He had kept so many things for the next time in his life that they got stale.

" If any person calls to be laughed at, it's you, father," said Mrs.

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Seugar. Mr. Seugar waited till she went out of the room and then did a small dance which he stopped in alarm when he caught sight of himself in the mirror. A blush darkened his face and he went out to dig in the garden. Later, his wife brought out a cap for him to wear; she didn't, she said, like to see a man digging without his cap.

If they had a cat or a dog, Mrs. Seugar said, it would have been just the same; why make a difference when it was a human being who came in at the front door, said a word or two in the sitting room and went out by the window? For all the time she was left alone, Mrs. Seugar said, it was company.

"It's a man," said Mrs. Seugar.

"What's he say?" said Mr. Seugar.

"It isn't what he says," Mrs. Seugar said. "With those snobby ones it's the way they say it; it's what d'you call it, that pansy drawl. I love it. He likes to hear me talk."

"Oh," said Mr. Seugar.

"Yes," said Mrs. Seugar. "Why?"

"I just said, Oh," said Mr. Seugar. "I'll try the window myself." And copying the landlord, Mr. Seugar himself stepped over the sill into the garden to his digging.

"That isn't funny, it's vulgar," called Mrs. Seugar after him.

Mr. Seugar said, "Oh, sorry. No harm," and came back over the sill and went out the proper way to put things right.

One evening the following week he met their landlord coming downstairs fast in his slippers.

Mr. Seugar went into his store room at the shop on early closing day and sat on a sack of lentils. He was trying to get a few things clear in his mind. "He sold me the house. I bought it. But I hadn't the right to buy it. There was no notice up."

Suddenly the truth was clear to him. "I bought *him* as well. He was thrown in. It's like sand in the sugar."

And then the cure occurred to him. Mr. Seugar went home to his wife and said: "We must arst him in. We've never arst him in. If we arst him he'd see his mistake."

"He never wanted us to have this house," said Mrs. Seugar. Once a month she suffered from remorse. "We oughtn't to have done it. It's a judgment."

"Arst him."

They laid out a table of ham and cake and tea and put a bottle of port wine on the sideboard. Mr. Seugar lit a whiff to make the hall smell, and went all over the house to be sure the landlord wasn't there already, and then walked up and down there until he arrived. He came at last and gave a long hand to Mr. Seugar.

"I hope you are comfortably settled. I ought to have come before

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but I have been very busy. I must go and present my apologies to Mrs. S. . . ." said the landlord.

"We have been meaning to ask you for a long time," said Mrs. Seugar.

"I go away so often," said the landlord.

"You live next door to people all your life and never see them," said Mrs. Seugar, "yet someone from the other end of the earth you keep running into. How long is it since you've spoken a word to the people in the fish shop next door, Henry?"

"This morning," said Mr. Seugar.

"Don't tell lies," Mrs. Seugar said. "Ten years more like it."

Mrs. Seugar drank a glass of port and went red. An evening of pleasure succeeded. They were celebrating the normality of their landlord.

"Is a woman's life what you call over at forty five?" asked Mrs. Seugar. "You work and what is there? You can't settle, you wish you could, but no, you must be up looking out of the window. *You* have settled. You've got your books, you can read. I can't. It's daft, I can't lose myself in something. If I could *lose* myself!"

Their landlord looked at Mr. and Mrs. Seugar and they could see he was appreciating them. Mrs. Seugar's voice went like a lawn mower running over the same strip of grass, up and down, up and down, catching Mr. Seugar like a stone in the cutters every now and then, and then running on again. They had a long conversation about boiler coke. It turned out that their landlord used anthracite which did not affect the lungs and Mr. Seugar said they had had paraffin at the shop in his father's time.

There was a pause in the conversation. The landlord looked at the clock and yawned. Presently he knelt down and they thought he was tying his bootlaces; he was untying them. He took his shoes off, then his collar and tie and unbuttoned his waistcoat.

"If you will forgive me," he said. "I'll go to bed now. Don't let me break up the party. I'll just slip off. You know your rooms."

"Sssh," said Mrs. Seugar when he had gone. "Say nothing."

Mr. and Mrs. Seugar sat like the condemned in their chairs. They heard their landlord go upstairs. They heard him walking in their rooms above. Then, evidently he discovered his mistake, for they heard him rush downstairs and out of the house banging the door after him. The following night Mr. Seugar went up to their bedroom at nine o'clock to get some matches and found their landlord, in his pyjamas, fast asleep in their bed.

Service was always Mr. Seugar's motto. He bent slightly over the bed, rubbing his hands. "And the next pleasure?" he appeared to say.

Mrs. Seugar came in. When she saw their landlord lying in his shirt, half out of the bedclothes, she made one of her sudden strides

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forward, squared her chins and her cheeks and made a grab at her husband's pyjamas which had been thrown on the bed. At the same time, she gave him a punch that sent him through the doorway, and threw the pyjamas after him. " Take those things away," she said.

Mr. Seugar was an inhuman man ; he was not sorry for himself but he was sorry for his pyjamas. He picked them up. As he did this, he saw Mrs. Seugar settling into an attitude of repose and heaving her breath into position. From Mr. Seugar's point of view, on the fourth stair outside and on an eye level with his wife's ankles, never had Mrs. Seugar seemed more beautiful ; it was as if she were eating something that agreed with her and that other people could not get.

" Where are yours ? " whispered Mr. Seugar emotionally.

Mrs. Seugar never answered questions. Now she came out of the room and quietly closed the door. " So refined ! " she said. " His mouth was shut."

Mr. Seugar opened his mouth at once. He and Mrs. Seugar had not slept apart for twenty eight years and, in a voice irrigated by what with him passed for feeling, Mr. Seugar mentioned this fact.

A new contralto voice came from Mrs. Seugar's bosom. " There are times," she said, " when a woman wants to be alone. I'll take the spare room."

And what Mrs. Seugar said she would take, she always took. In the spare room, she lay awake half the night going over the past twenty eight years of her life with a tooth comb. You make your circumstances or they make you, she thought.

By " circumstances " she meant, of course, Mr. Seugar who lay on the living room sofa, frivolously listening to the varying notes of the springs. An extraordinary dream came to him that night. He dreamed that thieves had removed the ham-and-bacon counter from his shop. At six o'clock he woke up, put on an overcoat and went up to what was, after all, his bedroom.

The landlord had gone. Mr. Seugar put his hand under one of the pillows and pulled out his wife's nightdress and threw it into the corner with his pyjamas when he had taken them off. Unfairness was what he hated.

" If I had had a different life," said Mrs. Seugar, to her friends, " things would have been different for me. I sacrificed myself, but when you're young you don't know what you're doing. I don't mean anything nasty against father ; he's done what he could ; it's wonderful considering . . ."

Mr. Seugar went out and played bowls when the shop was closed. He pitched the ball down the green, watching it as it rolled, and when it stopped he called out : " How does that smell ? "

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The fishmonger at the other end called back: "Strong."

But what Mr. Seugar was really thinking as he pitched the ball was: "I lay he's in the kitchen making tea." Or, "I lay a pound he's having a bath." Or, "What you bet he's gone to bed?"

Mr. Seugar was a betting man by nature. He would bet anyone anything, only they did not know he was doing so. "It's a mug's game," Mr. Seugar said, knowing that he was a mug. He did not bet only on the bowling green; he betted while he was digging in the garden, turning round suddenly and looking at the windows of both houses to see if anything had happened while his back was turned. A starling on the chimney would give him a start and he would stick the spade in the ground and go inside to see what had happened. One day when he thought he had betted on everything his landlord could possibly do, he met him upstairs on the landing.

"Are you looking for someone?" said Mr. Seugar leaning forward over an imaginary counter as he spoke.

"Yes," said the landlord and walked on disregarding Mr. Seugar as he always did, like a customer moving on to the next counter.

"My wife," said Mr. Seugar, "is in the sitting room."

The landlord stopped and considered Mr. Seugar with astonishment. "*Your* wife!" he said.

"Oh," screamed Mr. Seugar—the scream was inside him, in his soul, and was not audible. "Oh," he screamed. "The deception. I never thought of that."

He saw how he had been diddled. He went out into the garden and dug, dug, dug. Worm after worm turned in the damp soil. "I am mad," said Mr. Seugar. Mr. Seugar dropped his spade and, pulling out his key, he opened his mouth, put on a fish-like expression and went round to his landlord's house. He let himself in. Out of the study came the landlord.

"Good morning," said the landlord.

Mr. Seugar did not answer, but marched up the stairs and had a bath. After that he came down to the study. His landlord had gone, but Mr. Seugar sat there in front of the fire. Then, in order to annoy them next door, he poked the fire.

REVELATION

George Augustus Sala, the famous but frequently impecunious Victorian journalist, was introduced at a party to Attenborough, the eminent pawnbroker whose premises were in Fleet Street. "Glad to see you, Attenborough," said Sala. "I never saw your legs before."

Told by BERNARD FALK in *Five Years Dead*

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MONASTERY CAT

"There," said the head lama, "you see the tormented soul of our late brother"

by E. MACWHIRTER

WHEN the sun shone on the gilded cupola and burnished the rows of copper prayer wheels along the walls, and sharpened the golden fangs of the dragons on the roof, then the grey cat purred out of the monastery door to settle himself on the warm stone steps.

There he sat compact and contented between the carved wooden pillars, now opening his eyes on the day, now narrowing them on thoughts of sleep, now curving himself into a new sensuousness of relaxation, and now tensing himself away as the hem of a swinging red robe twitched his ears.

On the pillar above the cat was a hand printed notice fading behind the glass of a lacquered frame. *Saf-bala Gompa* it said; and behind the cat the monastery rose square and clean and colourful with the forest of its prayer flags wind-borne about it.

Before the cat stretched the open courtyard with deepset doors and narrow windows overlooking it from high walls, in whose enfolding shadows, a lama, smooth faced and quiet eyed, sat teaching their prayers to a cluster of small boys at his knee.

"*Om! Sambhara, Samaha jaba hum.*" Smooth and deep and encouraging his voice led the parrot piping of the chorus.

"*Om! Sambhara . . .*" And he would look up from the printed page to scrutinize each face in turn, then look down again to fold the paper on a new prayer. But occasionally his eyelashes would flicker briefly as he glanced sideways at the basking cat, and then reflectively they would sweep down again as his hand lifted the page and his attention returned to his pupils and his book.

Sometimes the voices droning out from the corner shadows lulled the grey cat to the composure of a deeper sleep, but sometimes their piping excitement would agitate his ears and send him treading delicately down the steps to whip across the courtyard, chasing his shadow or searching for the elusive tail that dogged his life. And soon his paws would crackle on a fallen leaf, and the cat would worry it in and out of the sunshine, now crouching, now pouncing, now exulting in his flat cracked miaow, and now purring with pride, until

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the heads bent before the lama began to turn sideways over shoulders and narrow, slanted eyes began to sparkle and to smile.

Then the deep, smooth voice would chide, " It is but a cat playing with a leaf. It is now new to you as the words of these prayers are new to you. You must learn whilst yet you are young. Repeat once more with me, ' *Om ! Sambhara . . .* ' "

But after the ring of heads had turned back to the lesson, and the mouths were once more opening and closing parrot fashion on the unaccustomed formulas, the lama's eyes would continue to follow the fluffed-up antics of the small grey cat.

He was not all grey. Black rings darkened the pointing of his tail, and black rings circled his short front paws, drawing attention to their bandiness, and a black streak emphasized the sinuous ridging of its spine. His eyes widely rounded and as wise as the lama's were now blue, now green and now golden, and about the grey neck was flaunted a crimson silken rag of the same rich hue as the lama's robe.

When the cat had first been discovered in the monastery, sleeping on the second lama's chair, and immediately driven out, and been rediscovered and turned away again the next day, and the day after that, a discussion arose among the monks.

The second lama would have none of it—cats were dirty and destructive and as full of evil powers as the Tiger Devils. The third lama also disapproved of the animal in the temple itself, although regarding it from a rat catching point of view he considered the cat might find place in the *gompa* granaries. But the head lama, interested by reports of the animal's assiduity in entering the temple, inclined to the theory that it was a Buddhist soul returning to its former haunts, in all probability lama Rintam's which had only two seasons since been among them, and therefore he ordained the grey cat must be accepted by the community and allowed to worship with them if he so wished.

The fourth and teaching lama having no theories at all but seeing only a small forlorn cat, tied the red silk rag about his neck, found an old wooden bowl for his milk, smoothed his coat to eventual silkiness with his gentle hand and allowed him the freedom of his room, to come and to go, to eat and to sleep, and to play as he chose.

And there he made himself at home, growing as familiar with the painted shrines and the gilded and turquoise-set images as he was with the corner where the wooden bowl always waited full of milk, and with the low couch before the window where the sun by day and the blanket-enwrapped lama by night comforted his sleep.

Gradually the cat had begun to venture down the rickety wooden steps and across the courtyard to the temple whilst the lamas

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were at prayer, and always on these occasions he would disport himself in the sunshine afterwards.

Then the second lama, a massive thin-lipped, forbidding man would watch the grey animal angrily.

" See how disgracefully that animal shames us," he would complain. " What sort of monastery is this where cats are free to come and go and to stuff themselves with food and destroy and deface our treasures ? "

And he would come pounding heavily across the courtyard, puffing and portly, to drive the offender away.

Then the head lama whose fading eyes seemed to look through the immediate world about him on to another world beyond, would reprove him.

" Do you not understand ? You think you see a cat playing with a dead leaf, but are you not witnessing lama Rintam's reincarnated struggle with his soul ? Do you not see he is fighting his own devils out there on the paving stones and we must help him." So saying he would fall into a reverie of prayer and keep the second lama fretting interminably by his side.

The third lama coming up from the granaries and storehouses would tut ! tut ! irritably at the sight of the frisking cat.

" Does that animal not yet recognize the difference between a dead leaf and a live rat ? " he would cry in exasperation as he dived after it, trying unsuccessfully to hound the cat down to hunt rats in the granary.

But the fourth and teaching lama would say nothing, only pausing to bend down from time to time to retrieve the dead leaf and set it spinning again on the wind, so that the grey cat might go chasing away once more in an ecstasy of delight.

So when there came two mornings in succession on which the milk in the wooden bowl lay untouched, slowly creaming to yellowness and souring itself blue again, whilst the falling leaves blew rustling but unharried in the courtyard, it was the fourth and teaching lama who spoke the first word of enquiry.

No, the second lama had not seen the cat, nor did he wish to see him. For two blissful mornings he had not been forced to bend and puff himself halfway to apoplexy on his way about his duties, straightening scuffed rugs and draperies and removing dusty padded footprints from brass and lacquer and the skin-stretched drums.

For two blissful days he had been satisfied to see the monastery looking itself once more, with dignity and not a wretched cat prevailing at its doors.

The head lama reproached him for his callousness : " Can you

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speak so of such trivialities when lama Rintam's soul is at stake and every thought in the *gompa* should be a supplication for his well being?" And he ordered the loud conch to be blown at once for prayers.

The third lama hearing the news complained that now he must find a new cat for the granary: "We must have a larger one next time. Those rats are very strong. Great cunning they have, too. Have you ever seen," he asked the fourth and teaching lama, "the way a rat will fasten itself at a cat's throat and slowly bite from its body the breath-bringing life?"

The fourth lama's eyes moved uneasily between their folding lids as if they sought a refuge from the description sickening his ears, but his lips remained quiet whilst he listened, and he alone went out in search of the small grey cat.

He was not in the granary, either alive or dead. He was not in the rooms of the head nor the second nor the third lamas. He was not on the roof top nor in the second floor temple. He was not concealed in the painted cylinder of the giant prayer wheel, nor hiding behind the clothbound volumes of the library lattice. He was not in the shed where the butter lamps were stored, and he was not in the room where the masks and whips hung.

To and fro went the bare feet of the fourth lama, with the surge of the robe about them no softer in its whispering than the grave-voiced murmur, "Puss! Puss! Puss!"

Outdoors and indoors, upstairs and down, endlessly and unanswered, he searched calling for the cat, until no longer could he persuade himself that the small grey cat was yet somewhere at hand.

The cat was still in his thoughts as he bent low in the last prayers of the day. He did not pray for the poor creature's soul as the head lama prayed, nor in thankfulness for his disappearance as the second lama prayed, nor in supplication for a larger and a fiercer cat as the third lama prayed, but he lighted lamps and burned incense before Avolakita, the thousand-eyed and the helping-handed, and there he prayed for the safety, good health and speedy return of the small grey cat.

Long after the rest of the monastery was smoothed in sleep, the butter lamps still flickered at Avolakita's shrine bringing shadow-life to the outstretched hands and to the all-seeing eyes, and gilding the figure that bowed and rose and prostrated itself endlessly on the floor there before it.

As the moonlight swung the shadows through their arc of slow moving hours, up in the monastery the fourth and teaching lama

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eventually exhausted himself with prayer, and down in the village the small grey cat grew weary of a two day courtship and turned its bandy legs for home.

His paws made no sound in their padded ascent of the wooden stairs, and the curtain swung noiselessly into place again. His tongue lapping in the bowl of fresh milk dropped sounds like rounded pebbles into the depths of night silence until the fourth lama stirred in his restless sleep.

Presently a gentle hand moved rhythmically on grey fur, and an immoderate purring dominated the room where the fragrance of incense still lingered, and where moonlight twinkled a thousand painted eyes.

* * *

ANSWERS to CONSEQUENCES on page 58.

1. *The three thieving roysterers, in "The Pardoner's Tale," by Geoffrey Chaucer.*
2. *Toad of Toad Hall, in Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows."*
3. *Godolphin Horne, in Hilaire Belloc's "Cautionary Verses."*
4. *The Piper who took away Hamelin's children—all save one—in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," by Robert Browning.*
5. *Sir Ralph the Rover, in the poem "The Inchcape Rock," by Robert Southey.*
6. *Belinda, in "The Rape of the Lock," by Alexander Pope.*
7. *Posthumus Leonatus, betrothed to Imogen and betrayed by Iachimo, in William Shakespeare's "Cymbeline."*
8. *Hans, who rejected Anne of Austria in the "Ballad of Fisher's Boarding-House," by Rudyard Kipling.*
9. *The Greek mariners, who were led astray on their return from the Trojan wars, in "The Lotus Eaters," by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160.

Across. 1, Colonel Bogey. 8, Eyebrow. 9, Step off. 11, Dossier. 12, Rossini. 13, Hades. 14, Unhealthy. 16, Baywindow. 19, Genet. 21, Upstart. 23, Rooster. 24, Emotion. 25, Yew tree. 26, Severn Tunnel.

Down. 1, Creased. 2, Lorries. 3, New ground. 4, Loser. 5, Open sea. 6, Egotist. 7, Feed the brute. 10, Fairy stories. 15, How are you. 17, Yes love. 18, Imagine. 19, Goodwin. 20, Natural. 22, Tenon.

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Star Gathering

"WHAT is this love of yours?" said the princess.
("Let down your hair! Unfasten
the gold rope ladder to the stars!
Rapunzel, hasten! hasten!")

"Rope ladder for a thief," said the princess.
"What is this love you swear?
how born? how cherished?" ("Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair!")

"Let down your hair, Rapunzel,"
"Whence do you come, dark lover?"
("From the broken gate by the garden,
where the alder-trees lean over.")

"What have I to do with the garden
and the cold trees standing there?
I am better alone." ("Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair.

A bird in the dusky branches
plays her brown-throated flute,
whose notes are silver apples,
and gold forbidden fruit—")

"Apples and a brown bird singing.
What have I to do with these?"
("—and the old low house, Rapunzel,
and the open lattices?")

"What is your name?" ("Rapunzel,
my name is Dream-in-dusk,
and Quiet, and Fulfilment,
of all the heart can ask.")

"I am afraid." ("Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair,
for love and death are wingless,
and there is no other stair.")

HUMBERT WOLFE, 1885-1940

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★*The love story of Rachel and Jacob is perhaps the best known and most beloved of all the love stories in the world. For in this tale of devotion and service—of delayed conquest and ultimate reward—lies the quintessence of all young love throughout the ages.*

For though "there be, God wot, more stars than a pair," there is for each true lover ever but one true love.

TIME OF WAITING

by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

I'VE been livin' in crucial eras, said the Oldest Inhabitant, for goin' on ninety two years. And things have changed and they haven't—but human nature ain't changed much. You take love, for instance. They thought they had it all settled when that feller Frood came along a while ago—anybody remember about him?

But I don't see that folks fall in love any different now than they did before he started. They may talk different than they did in the days of Young Lovyer, but they don't act different, not when it comes to the pinch. The ways of love may change, but love itself don't change, and no more does youth. The young 'uns keep going out in the world, the way Young Lovyer did, to see what they can see. Though not many of them served as long for their love, or had such a queer fight to win.

The Oldest Inhabitant's eyes grew bright with the past.

This Young Lovyer, he said, went ridin' out from Lost River in the old days with his rifle and his fiddle and his gamecock to fight at the fairs.

Tall he was and straight and good to look at, with his hair black as a crow's wing and the wind blowin' colour in his cheeks, and his grey, dancin' eyes.

He was the youngest of the Lovyers—the youngest of seven sons—and there never was a Lovyer yet that didn't carry his head as proud as a buck deer, or would give up what he's set his heart on for hell or high water. They was big men—good friends and bad enemies. They liked fiddlin' and huntin' and fightin'—good horses and somethin' to bet on and a drink to wash down the bet.

But they treated their womenfolks like somethin' you read about in an old ballad; they wouldn't lie to save their immortal souls. And if some of the stricter churchgoin' called 'em brands for the

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burnin', there wasn't a girl in town that wouldn't peek out through the windowblind, with a kind of consideration in her eyes, when the Lovyer brothers came ridin' down the street.

And Young Lovyer, he was their particular pride and darlin'. Though they didn't spoil him at that. When he was grown up, they sent him out on his own to find his fortune and to see what he could see.

All the Lovyers went out like that when their youth took hold on 'em—and, after they'd seen the world, they come back to Lost River, some with one thing and some with another, and some with nothin' at all but the look in the eyes that comes from seein' the world.

Pshaw, it didn't matter to the Lovyers what the boys brought back. There was always enough for all of 'em at Lost River—and when they got back there, they took root all the firmer for havin' been away. And now it was Young Lovyer's turn.

He rode out sort of wonderin', I suppose, when the road had made its turn and he was alone.

" Perhaps I'll come back with a buckskin bag full of gold dust," thinks he, " like Bill. Or maybe I'll come back with a fine big scar from a Spanishman's knife like George, and a paper tellin' how I beat all the King of England's fiddlers, jig, reel or your own variations, with diamond ladies lookin' on. Or perhaps," he thinks, day dreamin', " I'll be like Luke or Andrew—and it'll be a girl— "

He stares ahead of him, seein' a sort of cloudy thing with a honey mouth and eyes he's half crazy with longin' for and half scared to meet in the flesh.

" Or perhaps—" he thinks, and the wind blows a leaf on the road, and the horse dances, and he's just glad to be ridin' and doesn't care what he meets as long as it's somethin' new. I suppose we've all rode out like that once in our lives, in a way of speakin'. It don't come twice.

He rides out with the spring and it passes—and the summer and the autumn—and he's still out in the world, doin' this and that, and gettin' experience and fightin' his gamecock at the fairs. He doesn't find no gold mines, but he makes money and spends it; and if he don't come back with a scar on his face, that wasn't the fault of the man that tried to knife him downstream.

But he meets a lot of queer people, good and bad, and takes the hard and the soft of the world and begins to get used to its ways. And here and there, there's a girl, and, time to time, he thinks she's probably the one. But she never is, for the road's always stronger than her, and the fiddle sweeter, and the gamecock better company.

So, finally, when the winter's wearin' thin, he turns his horse's head round for home. " For a man can't travel forever," thinks he

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in his youthful wisdom, " and it's a long way back, and I might find what I might be lookin' for on the way. And if I don't—well, they won't plague me for comin' back empty handed. For I've seen the world, and the ways of it, and that's what I went for."

So when spring's burstin' out again, he rides up through the hills on his way back to Lost River. He takes a fork in the road and another fork, pushin' the horse a bit, for he's sharp set for his dinner, and twilight's fallin'. But he misses his way somehow, for when he looks around him, he's rovin' a lonesome highway through lonesome country, and not a town or a tavern in sight.

Well, he rides along for another piece, hopin' to meet some person he can ask the way of. But he don't meet nobody. And then, at last, he hears a sound you can't mistake, the sound of cowbells clankin' as the cows go home slow through the dusk.

" Where there's cows, there's bound to be humans and information," says he to himself, and reins in his horse.

They come along, slow and peaceful, through the fallin' evenin'. And a young, thin slip of a yeller haired girl is drivin' 'em—a girl in big, patched shoes and a ragged dress.

There ain't no use in describin' that young, thin girl to you. You can say she had blue eyes and a honey mouth—you can say she looked as if she'd risen up out of the ground when spring did, and a fittin' companion for it, in spite of her ragged dress. But, even so, you won't see her the way Young Lovyer saw her, when he saw her for the first time. It made the live heart talk in him and the blood begin to run to a fiddle tune.

She stops and they say hello and pass each other the time of day and he asks about the road into town. Then they don't seem to know exactly what to say to each other, but they seem to want to look at each other a lot.

Finally, the gamecock squawks in his little travellin' cage, and " What's that ? " asks the girl, surprised.

" That's my gamecock, Fightin' Fitz," says Young Lovyer, proudly. " I take him round with me to fight at the fairs. And this here's my horse and my fiddle and my rifle. They call me Young Lovyer from over by Lost River, and I'm goin' back there now after wanderin' a year to see the ways of the world."

" I'd like to see the world," says the girl, kind of plaintive.

" Well, there ain't really so much in it, miss," says Young Lovyer, consolin'. " Leastways, I didn't think there was till just about five minutes ago."

" That's all right to say when you've seen the world," says the girl. " But if you ain't seen it, you can't even say that. And I ain't seen nothin' ever but this lonesome country."

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" I'd take it mighty kind if you'd tell me your name," says Young Lovyer. " For if I'm a part of the world that you ain't seen, you're goin' to see somethin' of it from now on, if you and your people's agreeable."

" My name's Lorena," says the girl. " Leastways, my mother told me it was, but she's dead. Now they mostly call me ' You there ! ' or ' Trouble-the-house.' My father—well, they call him Stingy Hunks in the county, because he's everlastin' savin'—but he's a mighty strong Bible man, and I suppose that's a good thing for a child of sin like me. I got a sister, too, but she ain't a child of sin. She takes after father, and between 'em they reckon to save me sooner or later, though they reckon it's a mighty wearin' job."

Young Lovyer stares at her. " So they reckon you're a child of sin ? " says he.

" It's bein' a child of sin to be silly," says Lorena, perfectly placid. " And I certainly am silly. I'm always tearin' my dress goin' after blackberries when I ought to be scrubbin' the pans—and I can't sew a seam as straight as sister for the life of me—and once I asked a strange family in to dinner and they ate up all the victuals pa had for the week. I suppose it's a sort of ingrowin' sin, for I don't seem to get no better, no matter how severe they switches and prays. But they reckon they'll cure me in time, if they have to skin me first," she ends up, still perfectly placid, while Young Lovyer's all shook up inside by what he's heard.

" Only it's hard for 'em," says she, " for as soon as they got me straightened out in one way, I bust out somewheres else. Like now—when I see you in the road. First thing I thought was : ' That man's got a fiddle—and I've never heard one.' Well, ain't that a child of sin for you ? "

" You ain't never heard a fiddle ? " says Young Lovyer, incredulous. " You ain't never heard *The Blue Hen's Chickens* ? "

" Never," says the girl. " Pa don't take much stock in fiddles—they's silly and useless, only fit for the likes of me."

" Well, you're goin' to hear fiddlin' now," says Young Lovyer, firmly. He ties his horse and limbers up fiddle and bow. Then he plays *The Blue Hen's Chickens*, and he never played so well before.

" Thank you kindly," says the girl when he's finished. " Now I know what a fiddle sounds like ; and it must be even sinfuller than pa makes out, for it puts sweetness in your heart. And you must be about the best fiddler in all the world."

" Well, they say there's fiddlers in Ireland that plays a pretty tune or so, too," says Young Lovyer, modest. " And as for the sin of fiddlin'—well, I certainly would like to meet those folks of yours and give 'em a sort of rough sketch of what I think bein' sinful is."

The girl shakes her head. " You can't do that," says she. " Pa

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don't take much stock in strangers—not even Bible ones. But I'm glad I heard your fiddle, and I'd like to do somethin' for you to show I'm thankful, if I could know what it was."

Young Lovyer looks at her a minute and—pshaw, he knows what he wants well enough, but she's standin' there so young and sort of untroubled he don't dare ask her.

"You can give me a sip of milk if you'd be so kind," he says at last.

The girl laughs. "Well," says she, "if pa ever heard I give away milk to a stranger, he'd pray about it somethin' ferocious. But as long as I been sinful once today, I might as well be sinful twice."

She milks the brown cow, and they drink the milk together, warm and sweet. And then it seemed that there must be magic in the cup.

"That's like fiddle music—but sweeter," says Lorena, gently, after a while. "Now, tell me—what's it called?"

"Folks generally call it kissin'," says Young Lovyer, sort of shamefaced, "and it signifies that the two of us are in love and are goin' to get married."

The girl thinks for a minute.

"Pa won't take much stock in our lovin' and gettin' married," says she, "but if you say it's to be, I'm not sayin' no."

"You wait till I talk to your pa," says Young Lovyer.

Then: "Oh, heavenly days!" says she in a scared whisper. "The cows!"

Sure enough, the cows are strayin' on down the road. So they leave their love makin' and get 'em collected and she starts to drive 'em on again.

He and she don't get no more chance to talk that day, for just then a bitter faced girl comes down on 'em from the farm and fairly hustles Lorena away.

"That's my sister," says Lorena as she sees her. "And you come back tomorrow—for I'll sure get prayed over tonight." She tries to introduce Young Lovyer to her sister, but the bitter lookin' girl gives him one look that goes through him like chills-and-fever and don't so much as say hello.

"My girl's got a sort of hostile-actin' family," thinks Young Lovyer, ridin' on to town. "We'll have to change all that."

He puts up at the tavern, and after dinner he sits by the stove and tries to sound the townspeople on the subject of the Hunkses. And what he learns about Stingy Hunks is plenty.

He's mean and hard and clever, and if he cares more about his right eye than he does for a dollar, the fact hasn't been noticed yet.

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And he's religious, too, in a way of speakin', but it's the sourin' kind of religion that's just an excuse for throwin' your own selfishness on the Lord instead of where it rightly belongs. He isn't what you would call well loved in the county, but he's strong enough to make himself feared.

"I hear he's got a daughter, too," says Young Lovyer, casual.

Yes, he has a daughter; and a sort of wise lookin' smile goes round the circle; but they won't say more than that.

Young Lovyer tries another tack.

"I expect he has a hard time gettin' hired men," he says, and they're all eager enough to tell tall stories about the mean way he treats his help till he can't get a soul to stay by him.

"Well," says Young Lovyer, "I reckon a strong young feller that's seen the world could hire out to him almost any time, if he had the hankerin'."

"He could—if he could live on shavin's and sleep with the rats," says the man nearest the fire, and then the talk dies down and Young Lovyer's ready for bed.

"Looks as if my courtin' isn't goin' to be all summer breezes," thinks he, "but I ain't done yet." And next mornin' he starts out to see Stingy Hunks, fiddle, rifle and all.

He don't waste no time beatin' round the bush, when he finally meets that big grey stone of a man with the narrow eyes.

"Yes, I've heard of you Lovyers," says Stingy Hunks. "A godless, lawless crew of wastrels and gamblers."

Well, that ain't exactly an encouragin' beginnin', and Young Lovyer feels his dander rise. But he holds himself in check, for, when all's said and done, Stingy Hunks is goin' to be his father-in-law, and there's no use startin' family quarrels this early.

"Some folks has different opinions of us," he says, rather stiff. "But I didn't come over here to talk about my family, Mr. Hunks. I come to talk about your daughter, that I reckon to marry, God willin'—and to ask your consent to court her. For I aim to do things polite."

Old Hunks stares at him out of his deep, narrow eyes.

"Well, now," says Hunks, rather satiric, "since you aim to marry my daughter, I suppose you aim to support her. So you might as well tell me, if you can, just what you can do. I've heard of your folks, and what I've heard I don't like. But what about yourself—what can you do to make a livin'?"

"Well," says Young Lovyer, makin' his brag, "I may be not so good a shot as my brother Luke, but I'll shoot the eye from a rat as far as I can see him. And perhaps I don't fiddle so well as my brother George, but I'm as good as any fiddler in these parts. I can ride a horse with any, and fight a gamecock the way he ought

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to be fought, and if you want to lay a little bet on any one of these subjects, I got some money that'll show I'm talkin' straight."

Old Hunks shakes his head three times and gives up a groan.

"Godless, godless and thriftless!" he says, with his eyes narrow and canny. "I don't take no stock so far in anythin' you've mentioned. Can you farm? Can you clean a pigpen?"

"I can do as well as the next man, I'm sure," says Young Lovyer.

"Very well," says Old Hunks. "Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give no daughter of mine to a child of sin that thinks about nothin' but the pleasures of the flesh. But you work here for me a year and do my biddin'; without wages of course, for this is to test you. And at the end of the year, if you've done your work right and god-fearin', you come to me and claim your reward."

"That's a fair enough proposition," says Young Lovyer. "Done with you!" and he stretches out his hand to seal the bargain. But Old Hunks doesn't take the hand.

"Wait a minute," says he. "I'll lay a condition on you, just to see how serious you mean to act. You seem to take an ungodly pride in your skill at huntin'. Well, from the beginnin' of this year to the end, you won't fire that rifle of yours at so much as a target, or the bargain's off. Does that suit you?"

"I can't say it exactly suits me," says Young Lovyer, thinkin' of the eye at the sights and the finger on the trigger and all the joy and skill there is in good huntin', "but I accept."

"Then it's done with you!" says Old Hunks, slappin' his big palm into Young Lovyer's. "And now I'll take you out and show you the pens. They ain't been cleaned for six years."

But Young Lovyer, he hangs back.

"Don't I get a chance to see your daughter first and say hello?" he says.

"You hired out for work, not courtin'," says Old Hunks, firmly. "You can court the girl all you like in your spare time."

On the way to the pens they pass Young Lovyer's horse tied to a post. Old Hunks stops a minute.

"Whose horse is that?" says he.

"That's my horse," says Young Lovyer, swellin'. "And there ain't a horse in three States that can show him dust."

"Well," says Old Hunks, lookin' him over, "he looks pretty stringy for heavy work to me, but he'll do, once we've got him broke."

"We don't work horses like that where I come from," says Young Lovyer with a flash of pride. "We treat 'em human."

"Well," says Old Hunks, "take it or leave it. But if that horse stays here he works. Nothin' eats the bread of idleness on this farm, horse or human."

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Well, Young Lovyer's sort of dazed for a minute by the suddenness of it, but he keeps a stiff upper lip. He writes a little note and ties it to the horse's saddle, then, "Go home and tell the folks about me," he says in its ear and gives it a slap on the quarter, and the horse moves off. He stops and whinnies once at Young Lovyer as he goes, and that whinny goes clear into Young Lovyer's vitals. He's sure the horse'll get back to Lost River all right—but he raised that horse from a colt.

"Well," he thinks to himself, "I still got my fiddle and my rifle, and my gamecock to fight at the fairs."

Then Old Hunks takes him round to the pens and he sheds his coat and starts in. And there never was a dirtier job than cleanin' them pens—not in all the seven ages of the livin' world.

He's pretty dog tired when he gets to sleep that night. But next day he's dog tireder still, and so it goes on—spring, summer, autumn—and every day a regular back-breaker. He's farmed before and he ain't scared of work. But this ain't no ordinary farmin'. This is a mean man tryin' to squeeze the very vitals out of his help and his land.

It toughens Young Lovyer and it ages him. He lives on shavin's and he sleeps with the rats, and there comes time after time when it seems as if he couldn't stand it one minute more. And then he gets a glimpse of Lorena and goes on. But a glimpse is all he gets, and that's a fact. Old Hunks has said he can court in his spare time, but he don't have no spare time while he's awake. Old Hunks does his best to see to that.

But now and then Old Hunks slips up in his calculations and Young Lovyer can talk to Lorena or play a burst on his fiddle or aggravate his gamecock, and that's all that keeps him alive. For what Old Hunks can't think of to wish on him in the way of meanness, the bitter faced girl can. And so the year goes.

One thing he does find out in his few meetin's with Lorena. She ain't Hunk's real daughter after all, only his stepdaughter. And when Young Lovyer hears that, he naturally jumps up in the air and turns a cartwheel, in spite of bein' dog tired, he's so glad Old Hunks and the bitter faced girl won't be his real relations.

But even the hardest year ends sometime, and finally spring creeps up the valley and the day of his reward draws near. Soon it's the last weeks, and Young Lovyer goes about whistlin', in spite of his tasks.

He remembers other springs and the feel of 'em, and the first smell of the woods, when he's out with a gun to get the first fresh meat of the year. There wasn't no game laws then; they wasn't needed. He remembers the skill of the eye, and the skill of the hand.

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So now and then, when he has a minute, he takes down his rifle and thinks how Lorena's never seen him in a shootin' match and how he'd like to have her see him.

It's the last week, and for once he's through with his work before sundown. And the air's soft and he feels merry and he gets down his rifle and tries out the sights and loads it, all sort of idly. He even takes a sight with it at the ball of the settin' sun.

It feels good to have his cheek against the stock again. It feels good to have the trigger under his hand.

And then, before he can think, and while he's back in his old hunter's way, a big buck deer burst out of the brush by the lower pasture, with a hound dog after him. And before he can realize what he's done, he's fired.

The deer goes down like a stone, and the hound dog yaps, and there, out of nowhere seemingly, is Old Hunks; and Young Lovyer's still got the smokin' rifle in his hands.

Some folks say it was Old Hunks that set the hound on. I wouldn't put it past him, but I don't know. Anyhow, they had deer meat all the week, but Young Lovyer wouldn't touch a bite of it. And as for the rifle, he left that out to rust in the rain, till he got sort of shamed of himself and brought it in again.

Well, of course, when the year's up, Old Hunks says Young Lovyer has broke his bargain, and Young Lovyer can't gainsay him.

"But," says Old Hunks, "you've done pretty fair for a child of sin! I'll give you another chance. You can work for another year on the same terms, except for one added condition. I've noticed a fondness for fiddlin' in you—and you'll have to give that up as well."

And so Young Lovyer started on his second year, pretty near worn to skin and bone but dogged. This time all he had left was the gamecock, for Old Hunks had made the fiddle his second condition, and Young Lovyer wasn't to have a scrap of music to cheer himself or Lorena for love or money.

We won't go into the details of that second year except to say that the first had been gentleman farmin' and sweet summer breezes by comparison. Anyhow, that was the year that the gamecock died.

But at last that year, too, was over and Young Lovyer sat in the parlour, waitin' for noon to strike and Old Hunks to come. He had his fiddle to his shoulder and his bow ready to strike up a jubilee tune on the tick of noon.

He hadn't seen the bitter girl's hand creep in through a sort of door between parlour and hall and push back the minute hand of the old clock. He hadn't eyes for nothin' but the sundial in the garden and the shadow creepin' and creepin' towards the twelve.

It touched it at last and he held his breath. It crept past it

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and he made a sound in his throat and struck up his jubilee tune. The G string snapped first note, but he kept on.

But he hadn't played more than two bars before Old Hunks burst in.

" Bargain broke again ! " he shouts triumphant, and points to the clock. And sure enough, by the clock, it ain't yet noon.

But this time up rises Young Lovyer and his eyes has iron in 'em.

" You're goin' by man's time, you old sinner ! " says he, polite but wicked, " and you a religious man. But you look out at God's time there on the sundial and tell me if my bargain's broke or not."

Well, Old Hunks does. And then he looks at the clock. And shakes it. And the clock's stopped, as it might, bein' maltreated that way, and he has to give in.

" All right," he says, mighty ungracious, " you win the girl and I wish you joy of her. Now wait here and I'll bring in your bride."

" I'll be obliged for that," says Young Lovyer, smilin' for the first time that year.

So he waits. And in a minute or two, back come Old Hunks—and on his arm is the bitter faced girl, smilin' somethin' horrible.

" You've won me at last, my darlin' ! " she says, and stretches her hand to Young Lovyer. And there and then Young Lovyer loses every bit of politeness he's still got left.

" Take her away ! " he roars. " She ain't the girl I served for, and you know it ! You bring my own girl, mister, or I'll tear this house to pieces."

But Old Hunks just grins back at him, huge and mockin'.

" You bargained to serve for my daughter," says he, " and this here's my daughter, and the only daughter I've got. Little white-faced Trouble-the-house, she's only my stepchild, and well you know it ; though I'm not sayin' that if it's her you want we mightn't be able to arrange another bargain, say, on a three year term—"

But by this time Young Lovyer is just clean on the edge of madness, to think how he's worked and served and how Old Hunks has tricked him, last and first.

" Bargains ! " he says. " I'm done with you and your bargains !" and he snatches up his rifle, blind with rage, and points it straight at Old Hunks. But that rifle's all eat with the rust, and he can pull the trigger all he wants to, nothin's going to happen.

The minute after, he's standin' there, sick and shakin' at what he had the will and the mind to do. And Old Hunks has the whip hand of him now and knows it.

" Try to murder me, will you ? " says he, and he's got a nasty little pistol in his hand. " Get out of my house and don't let me see hide nor hair of you again or I'll swear out warrants against you

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for attempted murder, and bring you low. Get out of my house; and the next time you work two years for nothin', be sure you got more brains in your head than strength in your body, or the righteous will prevail over you, just the same."

Young Lovyer's shoulders slump, and he looks like an old man. And he goes out of that door with nothin' left him but a rusted rifle and a fiddle with a broken string and the thought that only accident has kept him from bein' a murderer.

He don't even see Lorena before he goes. They got her locked up somewheres. Two years ago he'd have chanced it and rushed the old man's pistol. But now Hunks has the whip hand.

He has pluck enough for one thing. "I'll be back!" he says, defiant, but his eyes are shamed as he says it and Old Hunks just laughs.

Then he's all alone, trampin' blindly down the road.

After a while he stops and sits down. He takes his fiddle up, broken G string and all, and starts to play on it, sort of sad and self pityin', till he gets a wail on the strings that'd draw emotion out of a toad.

He puts all his bein' fooled in that tune, and Lorena, and how they're parted, and all the troubles pilin' on his head. And he sinks himself so in the playin' that he doesn't hear a cart come by or the cart stop. But finally he hears a voice.

"That's a mighty sad tune you're playin'," says the voice.

He looks up and there's an old man lookin' down at him. Queer-lookin' old codger he is, with fiddler's hands, and wise eyes.

"You'd play tunes that sad if you'd seen all the trouble I've seen," says Young Lovyer. "I should think I'm about the wretchedest man in the world."

"Tchk, tchk," says the stranger, "it can't be as bad as all that, while you can still make a tune of it." He takes a fiddle and a bow from the back of his cart. "There was a bit that went like this as I remember it—" he says, tunin' up.

"No, no," says Young Lovyer, impatient, "it was this way." And he plays it right.

"Oh, that way, was it?" says the stranger, and he plays it over; only twice as soft as Young Lovyer and twice as sweet. Young Lovyer's eyes begin to bulge.

"You're a mighty fine fiddler, stranger," he says, sort of grudgin'.

"I used to be thought a fiddler," says the stranger. "Now I get a cramp in my hands when I play too long. But that was a love tune you played, as I reckon."

"It's a tune about two young lovers parted unjust," says Young Lovyer, very bitter, "and that's about the cruellest thing I know."

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" Cruel enough," says the stranger, " but what's love ? " And he plays a bar.

" What's love ? " says Young Lovyer. " It's the spring wind and the sap runnin' and the birds flyin' ; it's the heat in the heart and the sweetness in the blood ; it's fire and honey and fiddles—" and he plays what he thinks of love till the big white clouds in the sky is part of his tune. " And it's bitterness, and befoolin'—" he says, and he plays wild and harsh.

" That's right," says the stranger. " But it's patience, too." And he plays the patience of love and the long-sufferin'. Clear as mountain water he plays it and steady as the mountain rocks. And when he's finished, Young Lovyer knows he's met a master, but he's stiff-necked and he won't give in.

" And now what's love ? " says the stranger.

" It's longin' —" says Young Lovyer, defiant. " It's burnin' ; it's achin' ; it's havin' ; it's fightin' all hell for Heaven ; it's bein' young and alive—"

" Play it," says the stranger, but Young Lovyer looks sad.

" You can't play it on a broken string," says he.

" That depends," says the stranger. " But if you feel so—take my fiddle."

Young Lovyer takes it and on it he plays young love like a dancin' and a leapin' flame. But when he's finished, the stranger looks at him.

" That's right," says the stranger. " But it's sacrificin', too." And he sets bow to Young Lovyer's broken fiddle and plays the sacrificin' and the steadfastness of love till Young Lovyer hides his head in his hands.

" Oh, break my fiddle and let me go ! " says he. " For I've lost my love, and I've lost my strength and my youth, and now I've lost the last pride that's left me, for I've been outfiddled fair on a tune of my own choosin', when I thought I was the best fiddler livin' except for my brother George ! "

He reaches up for his fiddle to break it across his knee. But the stranger puts his hands aside.

" Tell me all about it," he says ; and Young Lovyer tells him the tale of it, and the tellin' seems to ease up his heart a bit.

When he's finished, the stranger sits silent for a while. " You've been cruel wronged," says he at last. " But how do you aim to right yourself and set things straight ? "

Young Lovyer rouses up, and there's a spark in his eyes.

" I aim to go back to Lost River and raise my six brothers," says he. " I aim to bring 'em here, and their rifles with 'em. And if men gets in our way—those men had better shoot straight."

" Yes, that's the old time way of it," says the stranger. " But

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there's law in this county now, and if you go to your girl through killin', the law'll see that you die."

"But how'll I get my girl, then," he says, hopeless, "for he won't give her fair? If you know so much about love, tell me that."

The old man stares at his fiddle. "If I know about love," says he. "Well, I was young, and in love once."

"Did you get the girl?" says Young Lovyer, eager.

"No," says the stranger, shakin' his head, "she married another."

"How come you let her do that?" says Young Lovyer, indignant.

"I was young," says the old man. "I was proud. I was hasty. I thought love was a burnin'. There was things in the way I didn't have patience to smooth out. So I went off fiddlin' and wanderin', joining up in shootin' matches and bettin' at the fairs. And when I come back it was too late."

"She died?" said Young Lovyer, respectful.

"No," says the old man, "her husband died and she lived unhappy. Well, I heard about it, but I was too far away; I didn't have the money to come back to her; it went in the liquor and the shootin', and the gamecocks that fight at the fairs. Then she married again and lived unhappier still. And then she did die. I go past the place where she lived last, now and then, and sometimes I play a tune."

"She sounds like a mighty sweet, unfortunate lady," says Young Lovyer.

"She was all that," says the stranger. "This is what she was," and he plays. "And this is how she died," he says, and there's a forsaken woman's voice in the strings. It makes the cold chills go up and down Young Lovyer's back.

"I never knew losin' could be like that," he says.

"It's worse than that," says the stranger. "That's just music. The losin's losin'."

"Music like that shakes a man's heart in two," said Young Lovyer.

"I mean it to," says the stranger, "and so I'll help you now. You won't get your girl back with the rifle, nor the rifles of your six brothers. But where the rifle won't do, there's a chance for the fiddle; and I'll teach you a tune to play and a thing to do that may work matters out right for you, if you're willin' to follow my lead."

"I'm mighty willin'," says Young Lovyer.

That night Stingy Hunks has just gone to bed when he hears a fiddle cryin' out in the lonesome night.

Low and soft it is at first, but loud enough to wake him; there's a queer trouble in it and a reachin' to it that gets between his skin

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and his bones. And as it goes on and on and he can't sleep, it brings to mind a woman he married, and a woman he didn't kill with kindness, however he did kill her in the end.

At first he just stirs uneasy, and then he tries to shut it out with the blankets, but it sifts through the blankets and keeps throbbin' inside his head. At last he goes to the window and flings it open.

"Who's there?" says he, but there ain't nobody answerin'. Only the big, dark night, and that forsaken woman's voice cryin' out on the fiddle.

"You better go away or I'll have the law on you!" he says, loud and firm. But the long, throbbin' cry is all the answer he gets. So at last he slams down the window and goes to bed. But it's little sleep he has that night, and he gets up red eyed and restless. And when he meets the bitter faced girl that's his own daughter, she's red eyed and restless, too.

The next night, soon as he's settled comfortable, the fiddle starts again. Finally, he gets his gun and opens the window.

He curses loud and deep, and he fires his shot. But all that does is to rouse the bitter faced girl and they both stand there for a while just lookin' at each other and not sayin' a word.

Lorena she hears the fiddle, too, both nights, but she sleeps sweet in spite of it, where they've locked her in. It's sort of comfortin' to her.

The next night Old Man Hunks don't try to go to bed. He hides out in the pasture with his rifle, waitin' for the fiddle to start. And when it does, he sneaks towards it, like a cat or an Injun, until he's almost near enough for his shot.

But just when he's raisin' his rifle, the fiddle breaks for a second —and then it begins again—the same lorn woman's voice; but way behind him now and off to the left. So he runs down and starts for it once more, but just when he's nigh reached it, it's gone somewhere else, and no matter how sudden he whirls or how wild he charges, he can't track it down. And then it ain't just one fiddle —it's two—then it's a dozen—but only that one sorrowin' voice forever in his ears. Till when the dawn comes up he's sweatin', though it was a chilly night.

Then the fiddle starts in the daytime.

It follows him while he's ploughin' and follows him milkin', it plays him out of the house and in again and sickens the water in his cup and the bread on his plate. And when he sees the bitter faced girl he knows it's followin' her, too.

He thinks of the sheriff and the court, and he knows he can't do nothin'. He can't swear out a warrant against a fiddle because it sounds like a grievin' woman and brings things he hoped was forgotten into his mind. He thinks of hirin' men to catch the fiddler;

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but by now he's got to a state where he ain't sure there is any fiddler, only a woman's grievin'; and, anyhow, he knows folks won't do nothin' for him. And each day the fiddle cries more grievous, and each night it cries more sad.

He's a strong man and a stubborn and he holds out longer than many a man would do. But he can't sleep and he can't eat, and that voice keeps throbbin' in his ears and buildin' up a face he'd thought forgotten long since, and tellin' what he did to a woman in his hard prime.

And now, towards the end of the week, the music has a new strain to it. It seems to be sayin' through the wail of it: "Let—Lorena—go." And in that sayin' is all the heartbreak of a woman who sees her daughter bound down where she was bound, and hasn't the strength to loose her, 'cause she's past human strength.

He's sittin' in his house one evenin' towards sunset. The doors is locked and the windows is shut, but the cry comes in to him in spite of it, soft and resistless as the night. He hasn't done a lick of work all day, for he don't feel comfortable outdoors any more.

At last he rises up and his eyes is beaten. He opens the window, and the cry swells in and pierces him.

"I give you best," he says, in a loud, hard voice. "I'll send her out. But for God's sake, keep quiet then."

Send—her—out, says the cry, remorseless, *send—her—out—and —I'll—sleep.*

He tramps upstairs and unlocks Lorena's door. "You can go to whatever's callin' you," he says, with a shake in the words. "And probably I don't deserve you should do me a favour, but when you're gone, you might say a prayer for me sometimes if you feel like it, for my sins has come back upon me."

He watches her go out through the evenin', and he waits, hardly takin' a breath, while that forsaken cry keeps on. And then, all of a sudden, it stops, and he falls into a chair, stone-heavy; and before he knows it, he's asleep, in the calmest sleep he's had for years. And when he gets up in the mornin', he don't pray the way he used to.

But Young Lovyer and Lorena, they're off on the road to Lost River in the old fiddler's cart, and he and Young Lovyer is fiddlin' *The Blue Hen's Chickens* to her so fast and merry that there never was such good music for a young folks' weddin' since time began.

* * *

In the world of mules
There are no rules.

OGDEN NASH

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O CALAMITY!

And Yet—

William Syme of Alpraham having the end of his nose bitten off by John Astbrook of Banbury in a drunken fray this year lost also one of his eyes in a mad quarrel by William Witter of Tarporley who was also an adulterer.

EDWARD BURGHALL, *Vicar of Acton, Cheshire.*
Diary, January 26th, 1630

Nothing—

We were in the middle of one of the great practical joke epochs —it must have been about '97, when I was four years old. One morning I went with my father into the dining room before luncheon. He was expecting as a guest at this forthcoming meal a supporter of his in politics, an alderman, mighty in stature, a very heavy man, and he now placed ready for him at the table a Chippendale chair, the seat of which collapsed when you sat down on it. As a matter of fact, over this particular incident my sense of humour at that time coincided entirely with my father's. I remember thinking it an extraordinarily funny joke.

And so, after he had left the room, I changed this chair—with tremendous labour, for I was very small at that time—with his own, and then hid under the table to watch the effect . . . My father sat down, rather slowly, waiting for the alderman's collapse, and then fell through his own chair with an expression of intense amazement and consternation, while my merry laughter rang out from under the table. He was not in the least amused, but got up, very red in the face, remarking at the same time, " I might have most seriously injured my back." My laughter soon changed to tears . . .

OSBERT SITWELL, *Left Hand, Right Hand!*

—Said the Philosopher—

. . . our little Austin was crashed into by a taxi last night, did a complete somersault and landed up looking like something out of the wastepaper basket. I thought I was going to break my neck at one point and was frightfully *annoyed, especially as I was in the middle of writing a short story . . .*

NAOMI MITCHISON, *in a letter to D. G. Bunting, July 21st,* 1935

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Befalls Any Man—

Mrs. R. at midnight screamed out and pushed the bedclose off her and called out: Mr. R. will you leave this place if you please.

THOMAS RUMNEY, *Diary, September 19th*, 1806

—Or Woman

archy she said to me
yesterday
the life of a female
artist is continually
hampered what in hell
have i done to deserve
all these kittens

i look back on my life
and it seems to me to be
just one damned kitten
after another . . .

it is not archy
that i am shy on mother love
god knows i care for
the sweet little things
curse them . . .

but it isn t fair archy
it isn t fair . . .

DON MARQUIS, *archy and mehitabel*

Either—

Many crosses today. Note from G. asking me to drive in her pony carriage, and I had to go to the London Hospital, and to Etty's, a horrid walk in the dark and rain, no cloak or umbrella . . . then coming home finding G. had been to see me at 6, all the fires out, the drawing room in a despairing state of disorder, and a heap of flowers to arrange with nought to put them in, and a dinner party impending in half an hour. These are indeed the miseries of life.

MARY GLADSTONE, *Diary, January 29th*, 1872

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Which—

How many creatures are at deadly feud with men! Lions, wolves, bears, etc., some with hoofs, horns, tusks, teeth, nails. How many noxious serpents and venomous creatures, ready to offend us with stings, breath, sight, or quite kill us! How many pernicious fishes, plants, gums, fruits, seeds, flowers, etc., could I reckon up on a sudden, which by their very smell, many of them, touch, taste, cause some grievous malady, if not death itself! Some make mention of a thousand several poisons: but these are but trifles . . .

ROBERT BURTON, 1577-1640,
The Anatomy of Melancholy

They Are Not—

"Law, Brer Tarrypin," sez Brer Fox, sezee, "you ain't see no trouble yit. Ef you wanter see sho' nuff trouble, you des oughter go 'longer me; I'm de man w'at kin show yer trouble," sezee.

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS, *Nights with Uncle Remus*

Fitted—

He that his mirth hath lost,
Whose comfort is dismayed,
Whose hope is vain, whose faith is scorned,
Whose trust is all betrayed,

If he have held them dear,
And cannot cease to moan,
Come, let him take his place by me;
He shall not rue alone.

But if the smallest sweet
Be mixed with all his sour;
If in the day, the month, the year,
He feels one lightening hour,

Then rest he by himself;
He is no mate for me . . .

EDWARD DYER, 1540-1607

—To Endure

Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward . . .
The Book of Job

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WINDMILL FIXERS

Even trespassers have certain rights — if they haven't been run off the place by sundown

by DILLON ANDERSON

THERE are more windmills in the state of Texas than in any other state, as every man, woman and child in Texas will be glad to tell you. Also, you will find more wind in Texas to turn these windmills, more trouble in finding water for them to lift, and more space that needs watering.

I was explaining these things to my partner, Claudie, as our caravan trailer swung and swayed along behind the big green cattle lorry. He was sitting on the caravan floor holding the oil stove, the hurricane lamp and the coffee pot in his lap so they wouldn't jostle about.

Up ahead in the cattle lorry, Backlash, the fat little negro driver, made for Waco, Texas. He had our dollar and the nearly full bottle of vanilla essence we had given him to pull us out of Dallas. He was driving so fast that the wind screamed and whined round the eaves of our caravan like she-panthers at midnight. His boss—so Backlash had told us—was expecting his load of cattle in Waco before dark, and Backlash was trying to make up the time he had lost in trading with us.

" Another thing, Claudie," I went on, " even the best windmill is apt to get out of sorts now and then."

" Windmills or no windmills, Clint, I don't like the way that boy is driving in front there," Claudie said.

" Well, we're pretty lucky that I got us this lift," I told him as I braced my folding chair against the rear door. " It's hard to be choosy when you've got to hitchhike with a caravan. Now don't get me off my subject again, please. We're going to be windmill fixers."

" But we don't know anything about windmills," he said.

" Not yet," I admitted, " but listen to me, Claudie: we've wandered all over Texas, we've dabbled in this and we've dabbled in that, but so far I've been finding better jobs for us than we can hold."

" We've certainly been fired from some nice jobs," Claudie admitted.

" That's what I'm trying to tell you," I went on. " You're nearly

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thirty years old, Claudie, and I'm even a little older than that. We need a speciality, and I've got it all planned."

"How's that?" Claudie wanted to know.

"I'll tell you how," I said. "While you were wasting your time yesterday at the fair, I talked to a Dallas man who is a real windmill expert—fellow by the name of Angus Pratt. Look what he gave me: a catalogue distributed by a Waco firm. It shows all the parts of a windmill and exactly how they work."

I let Claudie see the catalogue; then I explained it to him as best I could, and as he seemed to understand it fairly well, I went on: "They can teach you there in Waco how to fix windmills. A two week course. That's where Angus Pratt learned about windmills. You and I will sign up there for a little higher education tomorrow."

Claudie nodded his head, but the look on his face was vacant, like that of a man playing music by ear. I told him I was afraid he was never meant to be anything but a hewer of wood and a drawer of water.

About this time two police officers came roaring alongside us on motorcycles, and Backlash stopped. The biggest officer—the one with two guns holstered and a forked scar on his cheek—said to us in a very harsh way, "What kind of contraption is this? Where is your permit?"

Backlash dug out his permit, but, of course, it did not cover our caravan. The officer said, "You will all have to come with me to the Justice of the Peace."

"Officer," I said, "you look like a fair-minded man to me. This lorry and these cattle belong to a nice man in Waco, Texas. For all that you know, his heart is pure; also he is without malice aforethought." The officer listened.

The other officer came up and said, "I think he is about to outtalk you, Elmo."

Elmo gave the other officer a very bilious look and said, "Just who is making this arrest?"

"So far nobody is," the other officer said, and he said it in a very haughty way.

Then I made my move. "Elmo," I said, "I think you are a fine type of officer. Tell you what—if you'll let Backlash pull us off this road, nobody will be violating the law any more. Let's all let Backlash take this load of cattle on to Waco."

Elmo then said in a loud voice that we'd better get that damn caravan off the roads before somebody got into trouble. He spat on the side of the road and looked hard at the other officer. As Backlash pulled us into a green pasture at the side, I noticed that the sign on the mail box said *E. C. Wigginbotham.*

We unhooked the caravan under the shade of some trees, while

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the motorcycles sputtered off towards Dallas. Backlash left, fast, in the other direction; then Claudie and I looked things over.

We were about a hundred yards from a big white farmhouse surrounded by some cedar and hackberry trees, a red barn, a silo, and a tall windmill. I pointed out to Claudie that the windmill was running at a fast clip in the brisk breeze.

Claudie had no sooner scotched the wheels and levelled up the caravan than we heard dogs barking. Then we saw a whole pack of them spilling out from behind a long lilac hedge by the big house. They came bouncing towards us, and along behind them came a big square shouldered man carrying a double-barrelled shot gun over his shoulder.

He walked up to the caravan, shushed the dogs, and said in a very sarcastic way: "You fellows seem to be making yourselves pretty well at home." He was a good six and a half feet tall and he looked even taller than that, with the gun and all. He had a big black, bushy moustache, and a way of squinting his eyes like a man who has spent his forty odd years in a high wind.

I took off my hat and said, "Mr. Wigginbotham, right now we haven't exactly any way to get out of here."

"Well," he told us, "you'd better think up a way to get out. You are trespassers, and I don't want the sun to go down on you here." At that, I looked out towards the west, and there was the sun, not over an hour high.

"Mr. Wigginbotham," I said to him as I looked up towards the house, "I don't like the way that windmill of yours sounds. Ever have any trouble with it?"

"Some," he said, but he didn't say it like a man who counted on telling me any more.

"Listen to it," I went on as I cupped my hand over my ear. "Hear that *calung-capluk, calung-capluk*? Sounds to me as if there's something loose somewhere."

"What do you know about windmills?" Mr. Wigginbotham asked me. He was drawing a mighty fine bead on me with both eyes, but he'd stopped talking about trespassing.

"We're windmill fixers," I told him, and I held his eye to be sure he didn't look at Claudie. "You'd better let us check it over in the morning, first thing. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

"There is something in that, all right," Mr. Wigginbotham allowed.

Then I went on, "My name is Clint Hightower. My assistant here, Claudie, and I will have that machine singing like a new one before noon tomorrow. It won't cost you a penny."

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Mr. Wigginbotham agreed to let us look at the windmill the next morning . . .

Even a trespasser has certain rights in Texas if he hasn't been run off by sundown, and a share in the food is one of them. We had a nice supper that night with the family at the big house. Mrs. Wigginbotham was a fine cook; she served us hot biscuits, fried chicken and cream gravy, three or four kinds of vegetables, and wild plum jelly.

Mrs. Wigginbotham was not much bigger than a bar of soap, but she ran things round that house. She was the law and the prophets, and she was prompted from time to time by her old-maid sister Lula, who lived with them. Miss Lula and the Missus, as Mr. Wigginbotham called them, had little black snapping eyes, soft fair skin and dark straight hair. They both had very small hands, too, but big knuckles.

The ladies were pretty nice to us; nicer in fact, than Mr. Wigginbotham was. From something in the air, I had a hunch that if he'd liked us more, they'd have liked us less. As we were eating I noticed, too, that Miss Lula was glancing approvingly at Claudie from time to time.

After supper the ladies went back into the kitchen to do the dishes, while Claudie and I went out on the front porch, where we sat with Mr. Wigginbotham in some big wicker chairs by the honeysuckle vines.

After a bit I said, " Mr. Wigginbotham, it's nearly dark. I think Claudie and I will go down to the caravan and turn in."

" No," he said, " when the Missus and Miss Lula get the dishes done, we'll have some music."

" Music ? " Claudie asked, and cleared his throat.

" Yes, Miss Lula has a talent for music," Mr. Wigginbotham answered. He said it in the same way you'd speak of someone who had an unfortunate disease.

" You all must like music an awful lot," I said.

" I have to listen to it an awful lot," he allowed. " Tonight you can help me with that."

" We can do better than that," I told him. " Claudie, here, can sing bass."

" He won't have to," Mr. Wigginbotham answered. " I just want some company with the listenin'."

About this time Mrs. Wigginbotham came to the front door and said, " All right, Elbert, we've finished the dishes. You can bring the men on in."

When we went into the parlour, the Missus handed the lamp to Mr. Wigginbotham, and he put it in the holder on the wall; then he

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turned the reflector round to put the best light on the organ.

It was a beautiful brown organ, as big as some I've seen in churches. It had a dozen or more stops above the keyboard; and along the top, as well as along the sides, it had frilly carved wood decorations.

While Miss Lula pumped away at the organ and knocked off a few chords to warm it up, Mrs. Wigginbotham sat close by in a big chair that had red plush on it as deep as it is on seats in trains. Claudie and I sat where we were told, on a green sofa with a hard bottom, and Mr. Wigginbotham went over to a rocking chair by a window on the far side of the room from the organ.

Then Miss Lula turned on her talent. She played and sang a number of the old favourite hymns; like *Rock of Ages* and the *Old Rugged Cross*. Then a few songs about nice places a long way off; and finally, after goodness knows how long, she rang in a few numbers about long-ago love, veering her target towards Claudie, I thought.

The music had been going on for over an hour when I looked over at Mr. Wigginbotham. His eyes were glassy; he was gazing out of the window, and he looked for all the world like a man who had just trekked right across the country in a covered wagon. Then he looked like a man learning he'd have to go all the way back when Claudie asked Miss Lula if she could play *Mother Machree*. Claudie said he wanted to sing it.

Now Claudie sings a fine brand of country bass, and after he'd finished with *Mother Machree*, he did a duet with Miss Lula. She pulled out the *vox humana* stop, and they sang the one that begins *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord*, while Claudie stood there by the organ and turned the sheets of the music. Miss Lula must have been ten or twelve years older than Claudie, but the way they looked at each other when they sang together was enough to put a man's teeth on edge. I noticed Mr. Wigginbotham was pulling the left end of his moustache down to his mouth. He seemed to be biting it.

After a while it was all over. I could tell that the ladies were much taken with Claudie, and he was more taken with himself than I liked to see. When this happens he is likely to talk himself into such deep water that I have to bail him out, but this time he didn't exactly. He only said, " There's a bad note in that organ."

" The organ does need tuning," Miss Lula said as she smiled at Claudie.

" Claudie, here, can fix it; he was a piano tuner before he started windmill fixing," I stated.

At this Mr. Wigginbotham got up and said it was time to wash his feet and go to bed, so I told them that Claudie would tune the

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organ as soon as we'd done the windmill; then we went back to the caravan.

As we walked away from the Wigginbotham house I said, "Claudie, remember, the windmill comes first. I don't want you to touch that organ until we have finished the windmill."

"Wait a minute," he said. "You are the one that wants to fix the windmill."

"I'm only the one that had the idea," I answered. "You shouldn't expect me to do all the thinking and the work, too. Now please don't try to start an argument, Claudie."

The next morning, after breakfast, Mr. Wigginbotham went off early to the field to plant cotton, and Claudie and I went out to the windmill. There was a thirty or forty mile gale blowing, and I could tell it was going to be touch and go whether Claudie could stay on the tower long enough to make any showing at all, even if we got the windmill stopped. We found a lever on one leg of the tower that was very hard to work, but when we finally worked it, the windmill sang to a slow stop.

Claudie was balky as an old mule about going up the tower, even after I found him a monkey wrench and a pair of pliers. It was only when I pointed out that the ladies were watching him from the back porch that he gritted his teeth and started up the ladder. It made me really nervous to see that big lug picking his way along the little bitty ladder, but as soon as he got on to the top platform I felt better.

When Claudie came down, he said everything looked all right to him, but he had taken a little bolt out of a place where it didn't seem to belong and had put it into a place where it seemed to fit better. We worked the lever, and the windmill started again with a loud whine. I told him I thought it sounded smoother, but he said he didn't notice any difference. "Leave that part to me," I said. "It's still running, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's running, all right," he answered, "but it ain't pumping near as much water as it was."

We took a bucket of cold fresh water up to the house and found that the Missus and Miss Lula were waiting for us on the back porch. They said the windmill had not been so quiet in years. They gave us some gingerbread with hard sauce on it; then Claudie, carried away because everything was going so well, said he was ready to start work on the organ. But when we went into the parlour, the ladies said we should sit down and rest for a while after our windmill work.

They showed us the family album and a big leather backed Bible with every other sentence printed in red; then they showed us some stereopticon views. Just when we got to the one of Mount Etna in

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eruption, there was a worse racket outside than a volcano erupting against a tin roof. The noise was so loud that it started the dogs howling, and as we all ran out of the house, a peacock a mile or so away let out a long, high scream.

It was the windmill, all right. It was in very bad shape, and right there before our eyes it was getting worse. The vane and the blades were all winding themselves up and batting together, until finally all the machinery up there stopped completely. That windmill was tied in knots, and some big, bent pieces kept springing loose up there and falling round the yard, while Claudie and I and the ladies stood off at a safe distance and watched.

Mr. Wigginbotham came from the cotton field at the double; he swore a little and said things that really stung our professional pride. "What have you wretched fellers done to my windmill?" was what he kept wanting to know.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Wigginbotham," I said. A soft answer like that is supposed to turn away the flame of wrath, but this only seemed to turn it up.

"You've ruined it," he said.

"Oh, no," I told him. "It just broke down before we could find the trouble."

Just then a big metal brace of some kind sprung loose from the windmill and landed on the dairy roof. It bounced twice and fell to the ground, not ten feet away from where we were standing.

"You've ruined it," Mr. Wigginbotham said again, and I decided it was best just to let the matter drop there.

"Elbert—" the Missus started to say, but Mr. Wigginbotham paid her no attention.

"The stock—" he said as he stood there looking at what was left of the windmill. "How are the stock going to get water?"

I thought he moved into much easier territory for me with this question, so I said, "My associate, Claudie, and I will take care of that. Leave it to us, Mr. Wigginbotham. How many head are there?"

"Thirteen cows, eight mares and a span of mules," he said.

I looked at Claudie, and he looked down towards the silo; then I said, "Claudie, maybe you'd better start drawing water right away. It's a warm, windy day, and the stock will be getting pretty thirsty."

"No, you don't," Mr. Wigginbotham said to me, and I could see that, when you got away from the house where the Missus ruled the roost, Mr. Wigginbotham knew how to take charge. "You're the fellow that didn't like the way my windmill sounded last night. Well, I didn't like the way it sounded a few minutes ago. You can draw the water." He had the same look on his face he'd had the day before when he had the shotgun on his shoulder.

He stood there looking at me as the stock started coming from

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the pasture towards the empty water tank beneath the windmill. Finally he said, " The rope and the bucket are there by the well."

And as he turned to walk up towards the house, I said, " Yes, sir." He took Claudie with him.

A camel is supposed to be able to drink enough water to last him for several weeks, and I'd always thought no other animal in the world could match a camel in this way, but I'd never before drawn water with a small bucket for thirteen cows. For a man who has no liking for manual labour of any kind, drawing a lot of water is a very aggravating thing. Just when I'd begun to hold my own with the cows, and they had stopped bawling, the horses and mules came along.

Towards noon the cattle grazed off, and I was just getting a little ahead of the other stock when the water bucket sprang a leak. At first it was just a small leak, but it soon got so bad that I wasn't able to get the bucket up more than half full from the well. I didn't see another bucket anywhere, and, since Mr. Wigginbotham was still up there on the back porch watching me, I didn't think it was a good time to go looking for a bucket. Then the cattle came back for more water, and I couldn't help thinking what soft jobs those Israelites had in Egypt; they only had to make bricks without straw . . .

It must have been one or two o'clock when the stock all wandered off again, and I tried to stand up straight for a little rest. I couldn't do it. Long, keen, galloping pains arched up from my hips and looped across my shoulder blades.

After a bit the Missus and Miss Lula came down to the well and brought me some cheese and biscuits and some cold buttermilk. While I ate, they told me Mr. Wigginbotham was still in an ugly frame of mind. They said he had been trying ever since the windmill went wrong to get a telephone call through to a man in Dallas. He was trying to get hold of a fellow named Pratt there who could come out and fix the windmill, they said. He couldn't get Mr. Pratt on the 'phone, and this had made him much angrier than he had been before.

" Angus Pratt ? " I asked.

" Yes, that's his name," the Missus said. " How'd you know ? "

" In the windmill business I know the right people," I told them. Then I asked them what had happened to Claudie. They said he was tuning the organ : he had told them he thought he would have it in tune by the time they got back from town.

" You're not leaving ? " I asked as I felt a cold sweat pop out on my forehead and between my shoulder blades.

" Yes," Miss Lula said, " we're going to drive in to Midlothian to the meeting of the Missionary Society." They left in the old station wagon.

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It must have been an hour later that I saw Mr. Wigginbotham leave the house and go off towards the barn. I supposed he must have got his call through to Angus Pratt, and I knew that time was working against us from then on. So I went up to the house to see how Claudie was getting on.

From the back porch I called him, but nobody answered. I looked and saw Mr. Wigginbotham hitching up a team of mules down at the barn, so I went into the house to find out what had happened to Claudie. The ox was in the ditch, and I couldn't see how anything I did could make matters any worse. Claudie wasn't in there, but when I went into the parlour I could see him through the front window. He was idling round the caravan.

I had to try the organ. I tried the low notes first, with the stops in; and when nothing happened, I pulled out all the stops and pumped away for all I was worth. Nothing happened again. I tried the high notes and the middle notes, and I pumped until those pains started arching up into my shoulders again the way they had at the well. All I got was one little guff, like the noise a cow's foot will make when she pulls it out of a boggy place. That organ was deader than a doornail. " Well, Clint," I said to myself, " there goes the easy life. It serves you right for depending on that big, ugly lug, Claudie."

Just then the telephone rang and I answered it. Mrs. Pratt was on the line, and she said she had a message for Mr. Wigginbotham.

" I'll take it," I stated. " I work here."

" Tell Mr. Wigginbotham that Mr. Pratt is on his way. He'll be there in an hour," she said.

I hung up, ran out the front door and went down to the caravan. Claudie was there, leaning up against the door, cool as a cucumber.

" Claudie, you cluck," I yelled at him. " What the hell have you done to the organ ? How are we going to get out of here ? What are we going to do when Mr. Wigginbotham learns you've ruined the organ, too ? What are we going to do when Mr. Pratt gets here ? He's a real windmill fixer."

Claudie was so mixed up that he couldn't say a word. The trouble he had caused didn't seem to be dawning on him at all.

" I can't answer all them questions at once," he said. Then I looked back towards the barn, and there came Mr. Wigginbotham in a wagon. Two mules were pulling it, and they came towards the caravan in a fast trot.

As they drew up beside us, Mr. Wigginbotham got out and said, " I'm going to pull your caravan down the road to the public camping grounds. You're through here."

He had some rusty chains, and with almost no help from Claudie and none at all from me, he fastened the caravan on behind the wagon.

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I began to feel a little left out of things so I said, " Mr. Wigginbotham, while you were hitching up those mules, a 'phone call came from Dallas. Angus Pratt is on his way. He's a windmill man."

" That's good," he said without looking away from what he was doing. " I need a windmill man."

I said, " Mr. Pratt is a good one," but I don't think Mr. Wigginbotham heard me, since he was back in the wagon by this time. He spoke to the mules, and they went off so fast that Claudie and I had to run to catch up with the caravan. We got in just as Mr. Wigginbotham turned south on the main road. He cracked the whip at the mules, and they went down the road in a full gallop.

As we jostled along the road behind Mr. Wigginbotham's wagon, the sun was low and dark red in the west. While it slid from behind a lead-coloured cloud bank into the grey dusk, I watched a long northbound goods train pass about a mile away, edging along between us and the sunset. The train whistle sounded lonely and restless, and it did what a train whistle often does—make a man wonder if things aren't a lot better and easier where the train is going than they are where the train is whistling. I looked at Claudie and thought of all the misery and bother he had caused me since sundown the day before. And, as I sat there, I wondered how much longer a man with my talents could put up with him.

" It's a good thing," I remarked, " that we are getting out of here before the Missus and Miss Lula learn what you did to that organ."

" That's how Wigginbotham feels, too," Claudie answered.

" Does he know about the organ ? " I asked.

" He ought to, Clint," Claudie said. " He told me he wanted me to give it the same treatment I had given to the windmill."

* * *

PRODIGY

Julian Hawthorne, after achieving literary fame in his own right, was frequently annoyed by celebrity hunters who mistook him for his noted father. On one occasion he addressed a literary society, and invited questions afterwards.

A plump matron rose and simpered : " Oh, Mr. Hawthorne, I haven't a question. I just want to say that I've read *The Scarlet Letter* three times, and I think it's the most remarkable book you ever wrote."

" I am glad you like it," the young novelist replied. " And the most remarkable fact about it is that it was written when I was only four years old ! "

From *Coronet*

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THE FRONTIER

"There are some things," he said, "you just can't do"

by H. E. BATES

TWICE a month, going back to the tea-garden to work, he took the Darjeeling night mail out of the heat of Calcutta, seldom without meeting on the station as he departed some returning English nurse with a basket of primroses fresh from the hills but never, for some reason, seeing these same nurses go. Calcutta, with its vast and sticky heat, its air charged with postwar doom, shrivelled them in the moment of departure into nonentity. The hills revived and reshaped them, so that they returned, carrying their little native baskets of yellow and pink and purple primula, shaded with fern, northern and cool as English spring, like strangers coming in from another world.

He arrived at the last junction of the broad-gauge line at six in the morning, in a cool dawn of exquisite dusty mistiness through which in the dry season the snows were rarely visible. He longed always to see these snows, cloud-like or icy-blue or at their most wonderful like vast crests of frozen sea-foam, and was disappointed whenever he stepped from the cinder-dusted night train, on to a platform of seething *dhotis* and smoke-brown faces, to find that he could not see them in the northern sky.

He envied always those travellers who were going farther north and would, from their bedroom windows, see Kanchenjanga as they shaved. He thought jealously of the little nurses and the last wartime service girls he never saw on their way to Darjeeling but only, refreshed and snow-cool, as they came down to the Delta again, carrying their mountain flowers.

Wherever he appeared along the line, especially at the terminus where he drank a cup of milkless tea before driving out in the lorry the sixty miles to the tea-garden, there was a respect for him that was friendly. He had been travelling up and down there, in the same way, for twenty years.

He had a long lean figure and a pale face, rather dreamy and prematurely grey and in very hot weather blue-lipped, that had become almost Indianized, giving him a look of Asiatic delicacy. He had learned, very early, that in the East time is an immensity

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that does not matter ; that it is better not to get excited ; that what does not happen today will happen tomorrow and that death, it is very probable, will come between. His chief concern was not to shout, not to worry, not to get excited, but to grow and manufacture a tolerably excellent grade of tea.

He had a clubhouse at the junction, deliciously shaded with large palm and peepul trees, an old white house with exceptionally lofty open rooms through which birds flew freely, where he sometimes shaved in the mornings after the more hideous train journeys and then had a quick breakfast before driving on to the plantation. There was an army station near, and during the war the club had become a mere transit camp, with both English and Indian officers piling bed-rolls in the doorway, and rather noisy behaviour in the compounds.

There were often girls there too, and once he had seen an Indian girl, in khaki uniform, of the very highest type, having cocktails with a bunch of wartime subalterns who belonged to some dismal section of army accountancy and were in consequence behaving like abandoned invaders. It upset him a little. He looked at her with envious deep feeling for a long time. She had the creamy, aloof, high-cheeked beauty with smoky-brown shadows of the eyes and purple depth of hair, that he had never grown used to ; and he longed to talk to her. But she, too, was going southward at a moment when he was coming north ; she was simply one of those entrancing, maddening figures that war threw up for a few illuminating seconds before it snuffed them out again ; and in the end he went on to the plantation alone.

He always went on to the plantation alone. In the misty distances of the Dewan country there was a curious tranquillity and it entranced and bored him at the same time. It entranced him by the beauty of its remoteness. It had the strange tenseness, amplified in daylight by heat haze and at night by the glow of forest fires in the Bhutan hills, of a country at the foot of great mountains that were themselves a frontier. There was an intense and overshadowed hush about it. He felt always, both on the long truck journey across recurrent dried or flooded river beds and then on the green orderly plantation itself, that something wonderful and dramatic was about to happen there.

And nothing ever did. His boredom sprang from a multitude of cheated moments. The place was a great let-down. It was like coming down to a meal, day after day, year in, year out, and finding the same tablecloth, impeccably ironed and spread, white in perfect invitation. There was about to be a wonderful meal on it and there never was.

His plantation visits were like that. He expected something

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very wonderful to dramatize itself out of the hazy fire-shot hills, the uneasy nearness of a closed frontier, the deep Mongol distances lost so often in sublime sulphur haze. And he expected Kanchenjanga. The days when he saw the snows of the mountain always compensated him, in a wonderful way, for the humdrum parochial business of going the rounds of the plantation, visiting the MacFarlanes on the adjoining estate, talking of Dundee, doling out the Sunday issue of rice and oils to his workers, and eating about a dozen chickens, skinny and poorly cooked, between Friday and Monday afternoon.

He also conceived that he had a sense of duty to the place. He had rather a touching pride in an estate he had taken over as derelict and that was now a place with thirty or forty miles of metalled road, with hardly a weed, and with every tea-pruning neatly burned, every bug neatly captured by yellow pot-bellied children, every worker devoted and contented. And, though he was not aware of it, he was bored by that, too.

And then something upset him. One of his workers got drunk on rice-beer, ran madly about the plantation for a day, and then raped and murdered a woman over by the MacFarlane boundary.

When he got down to the plantation on his next visit the murderer, armed with a stolen rifle, was still roaming about the low bamboo-forest country along the river. Everybody was stupidly excited and it was impossible to get the simplest accurate report. The affair had developed into a gorgeous and monstrous mess, everybody at clamorous cross-purposes, sizzling with rumour and cross-rumour and revived malice, seething with that maddening Indian fatalism that sucks fun out of disaster and loves nothing better than prolonging it by lying and lamentation.

He organized search parties and sent out rumour-grubbing scouts, putting on a curfew for the women and children, and then spent most of the weekend driving wildly about his thirty five miles of metalled road in pursuit of false reports. In the tiring excitement of it he forgot to look for Kanchenjanga, only remembering it when he was far back in the heart of Bengal, in the hot and cinder-blackened train.

When he came back on his next visit, a week earlier than normal, the murderer had not been found. He was worried about it all and did not sleep well in the hot train, with its noisy midnight dislocations. It was a blow to his pride and he was angry that it had ever happened.

Then he fell asleep, to be woken suddenly by frantic arguments. He put on the light. He let down the gauze window and saw, in the light of the station outside, a mass of seething *dhotis* clamouring at each other with brown antennae, like moths. He shouted in

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Hindustani for everybody to shut up. A babble of surprise among the *dhotis*, with explanatory sing-song inflections, was followed by someone shouting back, in English:

"Shut up yourself! You're lucky. You've got a compartment. They won't let me on."

"I'll be out in a moment!" he said.

"Oh! don't worry."

He slipped his dressing-gown over his pyjamas and went out on to the platform, really no more than a length of cinder track running past the metals, and pushed his way among the fluttering *dhotis*. He heard the English voice again and then saw, among the crowd, under the low station lights, what seemed to him an incredibly unreal thing.

Standing there was one of the nurses he had so often seen coming back to Calcutta on the southbound train. She was very young and she was waving angry hands.

"Something I can do?" he said.

"Yes, you can shut these people up!"

Her eyes had the dark brightness of nervous beetles. Her hair, parted in the middle, was intensely black and smoothed.

"May I look at your ticket?"

"Oh! I suppose so."

He took her ticket, looking at it for a moment under the station lights.

"This isn't a sleeper ticket. This is just a—"

"Oh! I know, I know. It's the wrong ticket. I know. That comes of not getting it yourself! My bearer got it. In this country if you want a thing done do it yourself. I know."

"Where are you going?"

"Darjeeling. On leave."

"I've a compartment. I'm not sleeping. You can share with me."

"That makes me feel pretty small. Getting so excited."

"Oh, everybody in India gets excited. It's nothing. It's the thing."

"I'm awfully sorry," she said.

He called a porter for her luggage; the mothlike *dhotis* floated away under the station lights; and together they got on the train.

He always had plenty of food and ice-water and beer and fruit packed up for him in Calcutta, and the rest of the night they sat opposite each other on the bunks, eating ham and bread and bananas and drinking beer. He was fascinated by her hunger and thirst. They were the hunger and thirst of the very young and it seemed to him that she talked all night with her mouth full.

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"Ever been to Darjeeling before?" he asked.

"No. They say it's wonderful and it stinks," she said.

"You're lucky. You'll see Kanchenjanga."

She had not the faintest idea what Kanchenjanga was, and he talked of it for some time as a man talks of a pet grievance, a pet memory, or an old campaign. He told her several times how wonderful it was and then he knew that she was bored.

"Oh! I'm sorry," he said. "The trouble is that I like mountains. I'm rather in love with mountains."

"Really?" She sat crosslegged on the bunk, eating a fourth banana, her shoes off, her knees rounded and smoothly silken, her skirt pulled tightly above.

"Don't you care for mountains?"

"Not terribly."

"Then why Darjeeling? That's why people go there."

"You've got to go somewhere," she said.

He knew suddenly that she was going there simply because it was a place, a thing, a convention; because she had a piece of time to be killed; because she was bored. She was going to a place whose identity did not matter and suddenly he was aware of wanting to say something to her; to make, as casually as he could, a desperate suggestion.

He began to make it and then he found himself trembling unexpectedly and with immense diffidence, so that all he could say was:

"I—I—"

She took another banana and began to peel it very slowly, as if indifferently.

"What were you going to say?"

"Oh! it was an idea. But when I remembered it wouldn't—it wasn't possible."

"What was it?" she said; and when he did not answer she looked at him with delightful black eyes, teasing him a little, mock serious. "Please."

"Well," he said. "Well—I was going to suggest you spend the weekend on the estate with me. Oh! you could go on to Darjeeling afterwards."

She began laughing, her mouth full of banana, so that she hung her head. He saw then that her very black hair was parted in a rigid wonderful white line straight down the middle and he had the first of many impulses to bend down and touch it with his hands.

Just as he felt he could no longer keep himself from doing this she lifted her head sharply and said:

"I thought you were going to ask me something terribly serious. You know, like—"

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He was shocked.

" It is serious. The reason I didn't ask you the first time was because there's a murderer running about the place."

" What possible difference can that make ? "

" I'll have to spend most of the weekend trying to catch him," he said. " It wouldn't be fair to you. You'd have to entertain yourself."

" Entertain my foot," she said. " I shall come with you."

He discovered very soon that she accepted everything in that same way : without fuss, off-hand but rather bluntly, as if things like riding on night trains with strange men, changing her plans and hunting native murderers in remote places were all things of the most casual account to her.

It troubled and attracted him so much that he forgot, in the morning confusion at the junction, to take his customary look for the snows in the north. He did not remember it until he had been driving for ten or fifteen miles along the road to the estate. And then he remembered another simple and curious thing at the same time. He had stupidly forgotten to ask her name ; and he had neglected, still more stupidly, to tell her his own.

The three of them, his Indian driver, himself and the girl, were pressed together in the driving cab of the Ford truck. In the back of the truck were a dozen huddled Indians who wanted to be dropped off at hamlets along the road. It was impossible to speak in the roaring, jolting open-sided cabin, in the trembling glare of dust, and it was only when the truck stopped at last to let four or five villagers alight that he said :

" You can't see the snows this morning. Awful pity. It's the haze. By the way, my name's Owen."

She took it indifferently and it struck him that possibly she had known it all the time.

" Mine's Blake," she said.

" What else ? "

" Oh ! just Blake. I get used to it," she said.

All along the road, for the next fifty miles, he watched for the slightest dispersal, northward, of the vaporous glare that hid all of the mountains except the beginnings of the forested foot-hills. These first hills, deceptively distant in the dusty glare of sun, were like vast lines of sleeping elephants, iron-grey and encrusted with broken forest, above the tea-gardens that now began to line the road.

And then, thirty miles from the station, they came to the river. He had been looking forward to it as an important event he wanted to show her. He had spoken of it several times at village stopping places. At bridges over smaller streams he had shouted above the

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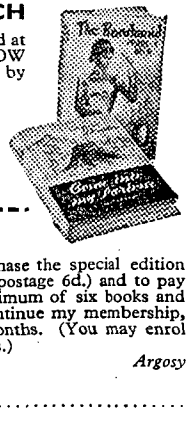

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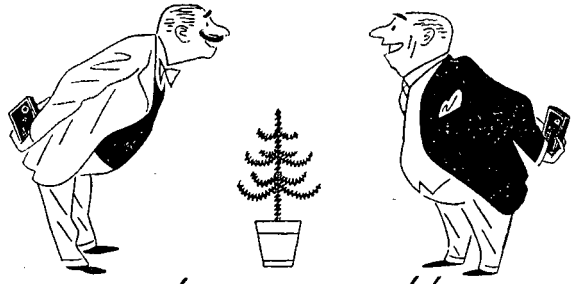

how sensible

Christmas presents would be

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noise of the engine: "Not this one. This isn't it. A bit farther yet. You'll see."

And then they were there. The sight of the broad, snow-yellow stream running splendidly down with furious and intricate currents between flat banks of sun-whitened sand, of lines of ox-wagons standing on dusty bamboo traverses waiting to be ferried across, of the ferry being madly poled by sweating and singing men against the powerful snowflood: all of it filled him with a pride and excitement that he wanted somehow to convey to her.

He felt in a way that it was his own river; that the water was from his own snows; that the snows were from his own mountains. This was his country and his pride in it all was parochial and humble. It was inadequate and he could not put it into words.

He simply stood on the deck of the slowly crossing ferry, crowded now with ox-carts, many peasants, a single car and his own truck, and stared at the wide sweeping waters.

"Wonderful, isn't it? Don't you think so? Don't you think it's a wonderful river?"

"Reminds me of one I saw in Burma," she said.

"Burma?" he said. He felt himself once again brought up sharp by the casual bluntness of her way of speaking. "Burma? Were you there?"

"The whole caboodle," she said.

He suddenly felt small and crushed. The river and all it meant for him, and had so long meant, shrivelled into insignificance. He stared round for some moments at the scraggy oxen on the ferry. The carts, he noticed, were overloaded, and the oxen, as they always were, underfed, their thighs raw and bloody from struggling against each other and against the ill-balanced pole of the shaft. He felt suddenly angry at the stupidity of the drivers who drove them with such savage lack of thought. The suffering of the grey moon-eyed creatures standing in the glare of sun, staring at the water, depressed him, and the miserable little songs of the ferry men, in a dialect he did not understand, might have been, in their primitive whining, the voices of the cattle themselves, whimpering in pain.

And then the girl said:

"Who are those people?"

"Oh! just peasants."

"No," she said. "The people with the car."

He looked up to see, on the other side of the ferry, a family of educated Indians, a man in European suit and soft white hat, a woman in a blue sari, two pigtailed girls in cotton frocks. They belong, he saw, to the big car.

"They're Indians," he said. "An educated family."

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"I want to get myself a sari like that," she said. "I want to take one home."

"Home?" he said. He felt suddenly and brutally pained. "When do you go home?"

"Soon."

"That's true of all of us. Soon."

He looked at the Indians standing by the car. He felt the collective pain of his thoughts about the oxen, the river and of the girl leaving India abruptly increased by the thought that he himself had not much longer to remain. In a year, perhaps in a few months, he too would have to go.

They reached the estate, with its pleasant two-storey bungalow of white-railed verandahs, its little plantation of pineapples, its papaia-trees and its garden of orange and rose and crimson gerbera daisies, purple petunias and now fading sweet-peas, about forty minutes later. He showed it to her with pride. Its windows faced a view of lawn and flowers, of thousands of tea-bushes in the gardens, neatly shaped under high and slender trees of shade, and beyond it all the line of elephantine mountains, smouldering in morning haze.

"Over there," he said, "is Bhutan. This is the frontier."

"What is Bhutan?"

"It's a state. A closed state. You can't get in there."

"Why not?"

"You just can't," he said. "The mountains are the frontier and they'd keep you out if nothing else did."

"Just like Burma," she said. "Only they didn't keep us out."

He did not know what to say.

"Awfully good place for your murderer," she said. "Once he's in there you've had it. It's all over."

"Yes," he said.

He had hoped she would not mention the murder. She had changed after her bath into a white dress with scarlet candy stripes, sleeveless and fresh, with a simple belt. The diagonal lines of scarlet met down the centre line of her body, continuing the line of her hair. Each time she lowered her head, to bend over her plate, he saw this line with increasingly aggravated impulses, aching to touch it. Then when she stood up from the table, after breakfast, he was aware of the line running down through the whole length of her body. It was the division between her breasts; it went on, in a series of scarlet arrowheads, to the tip of her skirt; it divided her brown sun-warm legs, fascinating him.

"What would you like to do?" he said.

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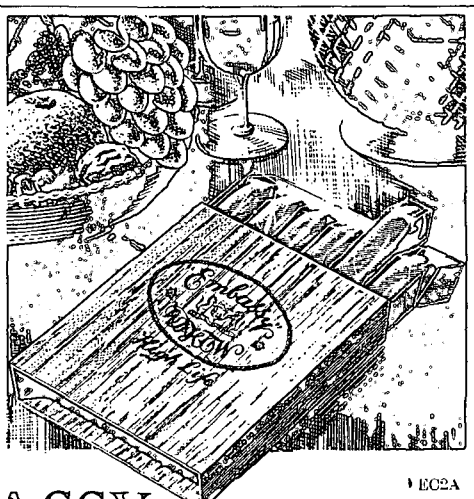

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"Hunt the murderer," she said, "of course. Isn't that what I came for?"

They drove most of that day about the estate. It was quite hot but she did not rest in the afternoon. Some of the excitement about the murder had died down and now there was a stillness of heat about the long avenues of tea-bushes, under the delicate high shade trees, that was enchanting. Bougainvillaeas flamed on roofs seen through far sun-washed openings of the gardens. Delicious small winds stirred in the forest of bamboo.

He showed her all of it with pride: the good new roads, the tea manufactory, the cool office where he paid his workers, the yellow slant-eyed children solemnly squatting with their tea-bugs spread out like patterns of dominoes, waiting for them to be counted. He let her pluck from the bushes a few leaves of tea.

"All we needed to make a perfect day of it was a pot at the murderer," she said.

After dinner they sat on the north verandah, facing the hills. In the darkness the smouldering hill fires seemed at intervals to be fanned by sudden winds. They flared with golden tips, then died for a moment, deep red, before they flamed and ran again.

She was fascinated by these fires and he explained them to her. They were the fires of itinerant hill-people, clearing sections of forest, burning them and then moving on. They were like beacons on the frontier, far-off and unattainable, mysterious and lovely in the tense night air.

And in the sudden lighter fannings of flame, as he turned to speak to her, he saw the light of them on her face. It accentuated the line of her scalp so vividly that he could hardly bear to sit there, an arm's length away, and not touch her. He longed to run his fingers down this line and tenderly down its lovely continuations.

And suddenly he knew that she was aware of this. She stirred in her chair, her legs stretched outwards. He saw her black eyes turn and fix themselves fully on him and he felt the beating undercurrent of their dark excitement. He put out his hands. In the hills a furious moment of fire leapt up and flooded her face with crimson light and he saw her lips, wet and soft, parting themselves slowly, ready to accept him.

A moment later he heard the voice of MacFarlane calling across the verandah, in the broad Dundee Scots that he had always faintly loathed:

"Hi there, Owen, where are you hidin' ye'self, man?"

For the rest of the evening the fierce parochialism of MacFarlane filled the chair between them: MacFarlane, tall and angular and stiff, spoke volubly of other Scots, of Scotland, of Scottish

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compounds in Calcutta. He bloomed with Scottish pride.

"Miss Blake, that's a Scots name, surely?"

"As English as—"

"I'd no' be sure o' that, Miss Blake. I'd no' be so sure."

"Well—"

"Better be true Scot than half English," MacFarlane said. Something about his discovery of the two of them on the verandah, together with the astonishing fact of Miss Blake being there at all, seemed to fill him with the hostile desire to taunt their secrecy. "Ye're like Owen here. He's Welsh. Ye claim to be English, and a' the damn time neither one of you knows where y'are!"

Owen felt the delicacy, the tension and the beauty of the day crumble in his hands. The girl lay in her chair, full length, black eyes dreaming, her body quiet and bored, and stared at the hills and their gigantic bursting flowers of fire.

But once, before MacFarlane finally got up and staggered off, the girl was moved to taunt him back:

"And when is Scotland going to capture the murderer?"

"Ah, he's about. He's about yet. We'll have him yet."

"That'll be a brave day for Scotland."

"Not a damn bit braver than any other!"

MacFarlane waved proud, extravagant, tipsy hands and Owen hated him. He looked across at the girl and caught the light of her dark eyes for a second and knew that she, too, waited for the time when the moment of shattered secrecy between them could be renewed. He felt his body once again ache for the line of her hair, and then MacFarlane said:

"Ah weel, I'll bid ye good night, ye damn' Sassenachs. We'll be glad to gie ye tea tomorrow if ye care to run over. 'Phone us up."

"Miss Blake hasn't much time," Owen said. "She's leaving India. Going home. To England."

"England!" MacFarlane said. "England's nae home!"

"Good night," Owen said.

"Good night," MacFarlane said. "Sleep well." He began to stagger away, across the garden, towards the banana-grove, from which he called with final dour triumph: "Not that ye will!"

When he had gone there was no sound in the garden except the occasional turning, like the slow page of a book, of banana leaves twisting in the soft air. It was a sound that gave the impression, now and then, of being part of the echo of the distant fires splintering fresh paths into the dark forests on the hills.

And on the still verandah Owen felt his own emotions bursting forward in just such sudden flaring spurts of exploration into the darkness where the girl lay stretched in her chair. He waited for a few moments after MacFarlane had gone and then he went over

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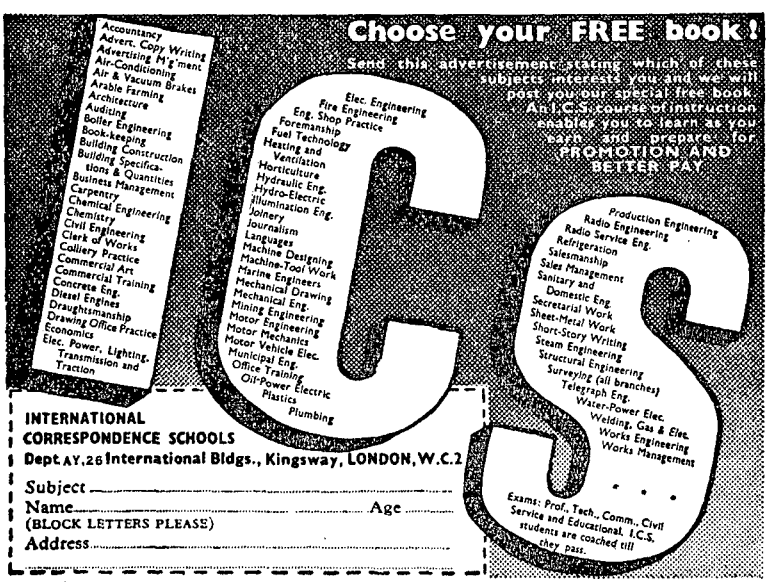

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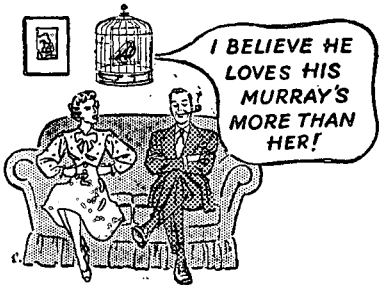

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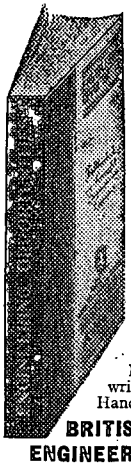

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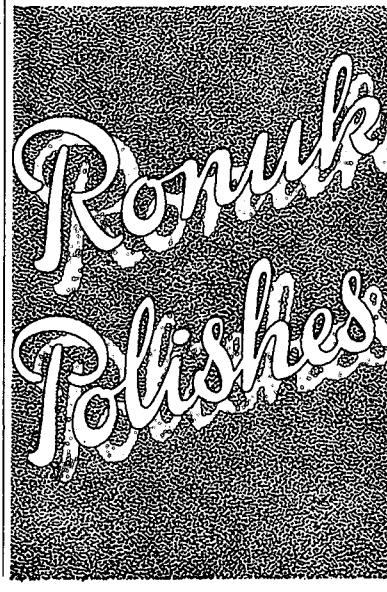

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to her and did what he had wanted to do ever since she had ridden with him in the train that morning. He smoothed his hands down the parted flanks of her hair.

She did not stir. After dinner she had put on a housecoat of dark blue silk and the metal zip down the front of it ended in a tassel of blue cord. He wanted to pull gently at this cord; he wanted the gown to fall away like the dark shell of a nut, leaving her naked body creamy with rounded bowls of shadow underneath it. He wanted to watch the colour of the fire from the hills on her face and see it grow rosy on the pale skin of her breasts, on her shoulders and on the intensely black divisions of her hair. But he did not do anything; he was paralyzed suddenly by withering shyness; and suddenly he stood away.

"I just wanted to say that it was sweet of you to come," he said. "Awfully sweet, and I'm grateful."

In the morning they drove across the estate again. He took his rifle in the back of the car. On the hills, above the fresh green gardens, so like orchards of privet, there was nothing to be seen, in the glistening haze of dust, of the fires of the night before, except here and there dead scars of burning, like black scabs, across the brown serrations of shale. The great fires were lost, like the smoulderings of matches, in the vaster substance of mountains, and the light of them had become extinguished by sun.

He wanted to drive her out beyond the gardens, through the first fringes of bamboo forest and on to the deep reaches of grass-swamp, by the river, where there were rhinoceros. On the narrow sandy track of the forest, like a white gulley between tall olive stalks of bamboo, they passed a running Indian, naked except for a small loincloth, with his bow and arrows.

"A Sunday morning hunter," he said. "It's the same the world over."

"Except here they hunt the murderer," she said. "They're probably all murderers anyway."

"I think we can give that up," he said. "They're really wonderful people."

"Give up nothing," she said. "It's what I came for."

"He's probably up there," he said. He could not tell if she were teasing him or not and he pointed to the hills.

"Then let's chase him," she said. "Let's get up there."

"It's impossible," he said. "You can't get in there. And even if you could, it would mean a jungle trek, an expedition."

"Then let's have an expedition. It would be fun."

"You simply don't understand," he said. "There are some things you just can't do."

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" They said that about Burma," she said.

Then as they drove on through the deep dry grasses of the river swamp, dusty and withered and only partly green now after the dry season, he stopped the car sometimes to point out the things he thought would interest her: a clearing where he had shot an elephant before the war, tunnels bored in the grasses by rhino, the dried tributary of a stream with its carefully built finlike breakwaters of stone, his own enterprise and invention, to prevent the sweeping erosion of the monsoon.

Whenever he stopped the car and stood up and pointed about the swamp she did not stir. She sat in the seat next to his own as she had sat in the chair on the verandah the night before, dreamy and quiet but with bright warm black eyes, so that it was hard to tell if she were bored or not by all he said.

" We'll see the other river in five minutes," he said.

Then she said an unexpected thing.

" By the way, did you come to my room last night ? "

" You were fast asleep," he said.

" I was awake and I heard you."

" I came to see if you had a mosquito net, that's all," he said. " Some people come here and because it's high they think a net isn't necessary. They think there are no mosquitoes. But there are. They come from the swamp here. You need a net."

" I never have a net," she said. " In Burma for four years I never had a net. I hate them. I feel they stifle me. I can't sleep with them."

" That was silly. It was dangerous," he said.

" In wartime," she said, " you get used to that."

He did not speak; but as they drove on again he felt overwhelmed by his own inadequacy. He had been doing the same two trips a month out of Calcutta, by the night mail, for twenty years; pottering round the estate; fussing over improvements; finicking and praying over it as a parish priest finicks and prays over the little eddies and whirls of a parochial pond. The war had come and swept disastrously over the East like an awful flood and had left him as he was.

And now it was time to quit India. The riots were beginning in Calcutta. The English—Scots like MacFarlane did not seem to him of the same account—were going at last.

He was glad when they reached the river. He got out and ran round the front of the car and helped the girl jump down into the sand. She was wearing a pure white dress of smooth linen that buttoned down the front, and once again he was shaken by impulses to touch the line of her hair and the deep fine thread, down through her body, of its continuation.

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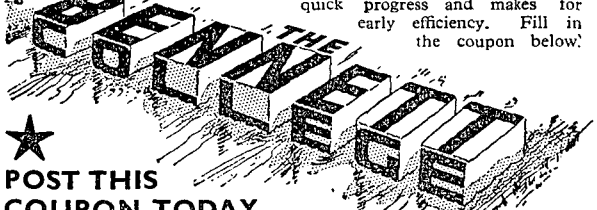

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"This river comes from the Himalayas," he said. "It's Himalayan snow."

"It's like the other," she said.

The river, very wide at that point, melted on the far side into forests of yellow haze. Strong green currents broke across it from all directions like quivering muscles. And it was like the other river, except that now there was no ferry to the other side.

The girl bent down and put her hand in the water.

"Icy," she said. "Wonderful and icy."

"This is the best view of Kanchenjanga you can get," he said. "Straight through there." He pointed upstream, against the sun.

"The water's wonderful," she said. "Why didn't you tell me it was so marvellous? I'd have brought a costume."

"There are terrible currents," he said.

She stood looking at the shore of monsoon-washed sand, white and fine as a sea-shore in the brilliant sun between the river edge and the grasses of the swamp. In its icy clearness there were great egg-like stones, whiter than the sand.

He saw her begin to take off her shoes.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"Paddle." She lifted the edges of her dress and unrolled her stockings, peeling them down her brown smooth legs. "Come on."

"No," he said. "I'll sit here. I'll watch you."

Standing in the water, holding her dress above her knees, she bent her head, looking down at her feet, and he felt himself quiver, once again, because of the line of her hair.

And then she turned and began to walk slowly upstream, in the shallow edge of water, swishing her feet. He saw her head, vividly black above the white dress, move slowly into the line of mountains, where Kanchenjanga should have been.

"Don't go too far," he called.

"No," she said. "If I don't come back you'll know I'm swimming."

"No," he said. He was agitated. "It's dangerous."

"Have a nap," she called. "It'll do you good!"

He stood watching her for a moment or two longer. As she stepped away on big white stones he saw water and sun gleam on the bare skin of her legs and arms. Then as she poised to balance herself he saw the line of her body going down, white and brown, with her reflection, to the bottom of the pools she was crossing. He watched her go like this, seventy or eighty yards upstream, past the first elbow of sand and rock, and then he sat down to wait for her by the car.

When the rifle shot came out of the swamp edge, also from

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upstream, and hit him full in the chest he did not fall. The suddenness of it seemed to give him a full minute of the clearest thought. At first it seemed simply to paralyze him from the waist upwards. He did not feel that he was hurt. It was only that his vision was rarefied so that he saw the white river shore, the water, the swamp edge, and the running Indian figure with the rifle as in a box of polished glass.

He held these objects briefly focused with the most painless calm and brilliance and then he fell backwards, choking.

Vaguely, as he lay there, he heard the girl running over the soft sand. It seemed as if she ran out of incredible distances. He kept his eyes open with the most terrible difficulty, waiting for her to arrive. And then when she did arrive he saw that she had taken off her dress, but whether because she had been about to swim or whether simply to stop the pumping of blood on his shirt he never knew. He had a brief glimpse of her face, white but calm; of her black hair with its tormenting central line; and then of her naked breasts and shoulders as she bent down. He was aware of her professionally unhurried hands, and of her voice, with the easy calm of a veteran scarred in battles, speaking phlegmatically.

"That was your murderer all right," she said. "That was one of your wonderful people."

He lay on the sand, burned by sun, and tried to answer. He could not speak. All the life of his body, borne on a great torrent of blood, was flowing back to his head, choking with its hideous congestion his sight and breath. He made weak and frantic signs that he wanted to sit up.

She put her arms about him and held him upright for a few seconds longer. He whimpered in a great struggle to withhold from her his weakness, his terror and the flow of blood.

"Don't worry," she said. "It's all right. I'm with you. Try not to move."

He made another immense and tortured effort to speak but there was no sound from his mouth. Everything he wanted to say became compressed, in a final glittering moment, into his eyes. She saw them convulsively trying to fix themselves on herself, the sky and the mountains. This convulsion, calming down at last, gave way to a startling flash of reflected light. It leapt into the dying retina with such brilliance that she turned and instinctively looked behind her, towards the swamp and the mountains, as if for a second he had seen the murderer coming back.

But when she turned there was no one there; and when she looked back at his eyes she saw that all sight of sky, mountains and the haze that hid the farther mountains had been extinguished, too.

Nothing but herself remained.

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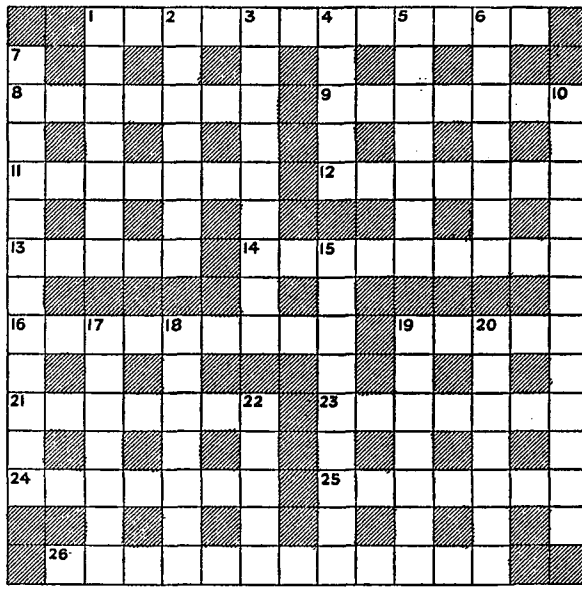
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 109



CLUES

Across

1 Scratch soldier (7, 5).

8 Would you raise this for a Cockney intellectual ? (7).

9 A wet welcome follows this at the end of the pirate plank (4, 3).

11 The documents in the case (7).

12 Italian composer of "The Barber of Seville" (7).

13 In the shade of the Underworld (5).

14 No fiddle could be this ! (9).

16 The part of the room overlooking the harbour ? (9).

19 Get around a compass point for a fur (5).

21 The sort of bounder one would like to see sit on a drawing pin ! (7).

23 Half a cock and bull story (7).

24 O ! No time for expressing feelings ! (7).

25 Did Miss Betsey Barker's cow suffer through eating this ? (3, 4).

26 The western Underground Service ? (6, 6).

Down

1 As in belief, so pleats are (7).

2 Sorrel and I on the road (7).

3 No good for fossils ? (3, 6).

4 The fiftieth rose gets mixed up and fails (5).

5 Over the Bar—but with not a bottle in sight ? (4, 3).

6 He is to get reformed —or should be ! (7).

7 Cynical advice to cooks and newlyweds (4, 3, 5).

10 Told by late husbands to wives, and by wives to the children (5, 7).

15 Usually the speaker of this greeting does not expect a literal answer (3, 3, 3).

17 Mr. Henpeck's concession (3, 4).

18 Put an image in a dream (7).

19 It wouldn't be as simple as it sounds to have an easy victory here in the North Sea (7).

20 It's only to be expected that half of nature is to be found on the mountains (7).

22 Kind of saw, some added (5).

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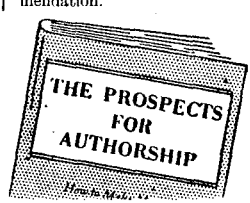

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